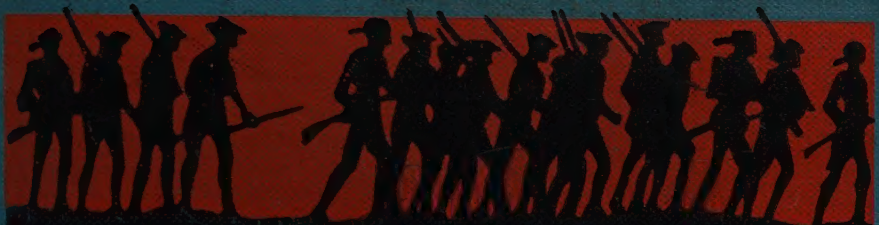

NINETY-SIX

— BY E·C·McCANTS —

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NINETY SIX

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BY

ELLIOTT CRAYTON McCANTS

A NOVEL

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INTRODUCTORY

Down in South Carolina, on a single-track, cross-country line of railway which winds in and out among red and rain-gullied hills, a traveller, if he be not a native, is sometimes stirred into mild inquisitiveness by the station call, "Ninety Six."

It is true that in the mellow past, when this state still regarded itself as a part of the Union, odd names for villages and hamlets within its borders were not infrequent. But with the passage of time and the vicissitudes of change, the indigenous flavor of such place-names has tended to evaporate and to give place to a cosmopolitan flatness in the matter of nomenclature. In this way, "Trick 'em" has become "Troy," "Frog Level" has been changed to "Prosperity," and the historic "Ape-yard"— so called from a fancied resemblance between its erstwhile inhabitants and their prehistoric ancestors— is now the fashionable suburb, "Sans Souci."

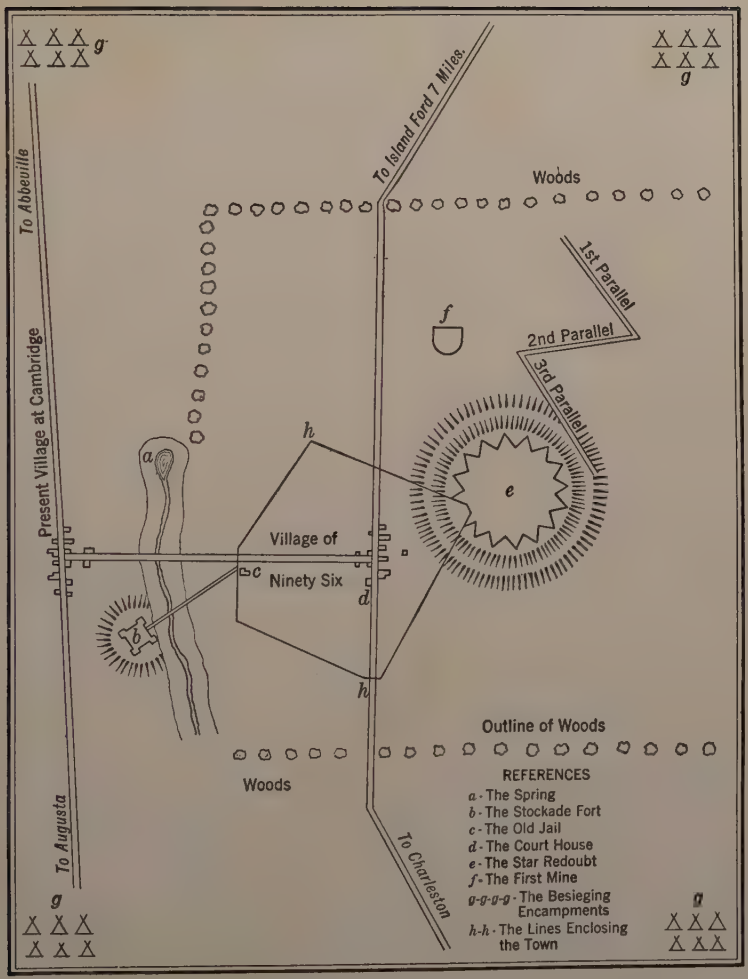
But Ninety Six is not even a name—it is a number. And the number is borrowed, for the present village is not the real Ninety Six at all. That lies two or three miles to the southward and not one stone of it rests upon another. Not one stone—that is literally true, but bankings of the earth and burrowings in it are more enduring than stone walls, and evi-

dences of such are to be found on the ancient site. The country roads, too, gather into a plexus at this point, for this vanished Ninety Six was "no mean city."

In the colonial days, when South Carolina was still "His Majesty's most loyal Province," hither to a point on the Keowee Trail—the great trading path between the Cherokee towns and Charleston—came Captain John Francis who built here a stockade and a trading-house. The place was called Ninety Six, says the literal-minded historian to whom the annals of mankind are largely dates and distances, because the spot was ninety-six miles removed from the Indian town of Keowee. But the grandmothers of the present community account for the name after another fashion.

They say that the appellation is a monument to an Indian maiden. It appears that John Francis had a son who became a trader among the Cherokees. And it seems that wherever there are young men and maidens there is talk of love; and wherever there are old men and traffic there is talk of war. Allen Francis loved the daughter of the chieftain of Keowee and she loved him, but when Allen had gone back for a season to the trading-house of his father, the Indians planned to raid that place for the sake of the gain that might accrue.

Love, however, was stronger in the maiden's heart than duty, so learning of the prospective treachery, she fled away down the long path in or-



STAR FORT AND VICINITY

(From McCrady's *History of the Revolution in South Carolina, 1780–1783.*)

der to warn her lover. And as she went she numbered the streams, which were many, but the ninety-sixth stream was the creek which flowed by the trading-house. Therefore, that place is Ninety Six until this day.

Be all this as it may, the settlement in the wilderness prospered. At an early date it was the principal town on the western frontier of the state. Soon it became the seat of justice for a considerable district. A stone jail came into being, a courthouse, a tavern, and streets busy with traffic; and near it the first blood of the Revolution, spilt in the state, was shed.

After the fall of Charleston the town became a British position of importance. In a grove of oaks, on the high hilltop overlooking the valley of the creek, there are still in existence the embankments of the "Star Redoubt" which Cruger held, and against which Greene threw his Continentals in vain. And a short distance away is the entrance to Kosciusko's mine—the underground passage of which is still practicable.

Other than these things, nothing of the old town remains; but three miles away, on the very outskirts of the modern village, there flows a little stream. That stream is known as "Kate Fowler's Branch."

As for Kate Fowler herself—the curtain rises on our story.

NINETY SIX

CHAPTER I

"HALT!"

The sharp challenge came from a stocky sentry who, clad in the green uniform of The Queen's New York Regiment of Royalists, barred the narrow lane between the fenced fields—well-cultivated fields which, in spite of the almost indestructible heart-pine stumps which had defied the axes and plows of the cultivators, exhibited clear evidence of a quarter of a century of tillage. Beyond the fields lay dark woods—shaggy, untamed forests—stretching on the one hand mile after mile toward the swamps of the coast country and on the other far away in the direction of the mountains and the lands of the Cherokees—dark, mysterious, menacing forests wherein, in the night time, wolves howled and panthers screamed—forests, however, which were occasionally broken by sunny stretches of blossoming prairie, by grassy glades where the wild deer fed, and by the isolated clearings of the backwoods settlers.

From a bend in the road some two hundred yards away, the girl on the horse had sighted the sentinel

but had ridden straight on. Now, as if surprised at the challenge, she checked her mount which, powerful and impatient, stopped with his forefeet extended and planted, his neck bowed, his nostrils distended.

The rider, lithe, dark, black-eyed and red-lipped, intensely feminine yet conveying to a beholder an impression of fearless vitality and of resourcefulness held in reserve, glanced loftily at the soldier.

"Oh, la! la!" she ejaculated. "Why all this pother, pray?"

"Stand!" stolidly reiterated the red-faced, sweating sentry. "I ha' me orders—Leftenant! Leftenant Maclae!"

At a point some fifty yards removed, where a snake fence turned away from the road which here debouched from the forest, a party of perhaps twenty men were resting under the trees and refreshing themselves with cold beef and bread. The majority of the group were evidently soldiers from the same command as the sentry, but among them were two or three lank individuals clad in homespun, wearing coonskin caps, and armed with rifle and huntingknife instead of musket and bayonet. A few paces away from the group a young officer in a new uniform that was topped by a feathered shako had been walking, with rather an important air, gravely back and forth.

The challenge of the sentry did not in the least disturb the regular soldiers—they continued to dis-

pose of their provender in a manner so earnest as to suggest that this was their chief aim in life—but each individual in homespun had, at the first alarm, dropped all that he held and seized his rifle. The officer, likewise, had at the very first challenge given the situation his attention and had approached the point of controversy so rapidly that, even as his name was called, he stood at the sentinel's side observing with interest the very superior pose of the attractive intruder.

Nevertheless, since he was quite a youthful officer, he spoke brusquely.

"What have we here?" he demanded.

"A woman, sir."

The girl laughed sarcastically. "That ye have the wit to perceive so much amazeth me," she mocked, nodding at the embarrassed sentry. "And you, young sir— Are you so ill-acquainted with the world as to require prompting concerning that which stands afore ye? 'Tis a woman verily—I do assure you on't — But something more, if it please you. A gentlewoman rudely interrupted while riding upon her own business."

The young man smiled disarmingly, removed his shako and held it against his breast while he bowed.

"A thousand pardons, Mistress," he begged with easy politeness.

She smiled mockingly in return. "Very prettily done!" she observed. "But why obstruct the road?"

The officer bowed again. "Is beauty, then, so com-

mon that one should forego the chance to look a second time upon it?" he inquired with a touch of her own raillery. Then, replacing his shako, he stepped forward as if to stand at her stirrup, but the horse, impelled by a hidden pressure from his rider's knee, curvetted, tossed his head, and backed uneasily away.

"Steady, Bullet! Steady, sir!" With feminine guile she appeared to soothe the animal while she gained, thus surreptitiously, a yard or two more of distance. "My horse is a shy beast," she explained demurely, "and declineth the honor of your closer acquaintance."

The lieutenant ceased to advance and the girl, her purpose accomplished, sat erect in her saddle and regarded him. Thus posed, she presented a striking picture. Her tight jacket outlined the curves of her bust and her supple waist; her riding habit, pressed by the breeze, revealed the competence of the full, tapering thigh which at the knee caught the horn of the sidesaddle.

"My orders are an affliction to me," began the young man, "in that in obeying them I incommode you. Yesterday Colonel Balfour occupied the town yonder and its defenses—"

"I know all that. Did ye stop me thinking to enlarge my knowledge?"

The officer flushed, then continued speaking—this time more stiffly. "Today we are patrolling the roads

under orders to halt all travellers and bring them in to the post for examination."

"I am no traveller. I live but a half mile beyond."

"Then you have but to turn back with us," he observed, "and we will escort you home."

She glanced at him again. He was very straight and very handsome as he stood there in the May sunshine—very boyish, almost comically stern. He had an air of breeding about him—in her isolated existence it had not been her lot to meet many such as he. She smiled upon him but the temptation to tease him further was irresistible.

"Truly, you tempt me, kind sir," she replied ironically, "with the offer of your further company; but it happens that I do not care to turn. I have business elsewhere."

He stiffened and lifted his chin. "I am sorry, but in such case my orders are explicit. I must conduct you to Colonel Cruger who, as being the better versed in American ways, has been deputed by Balfour—"

"La! La! What timorous folk you are!" interrupted she. "Is not Charles Town fallen? Is not the war in this province ended? Has not the Carolina army surrendered? Is not Rutledge in flight? What fear ye? A maid on a horse?"

The whip of her sarcasm brought the blood to his cheek and a flash into his eyes. "Rutledge!" he exclaimed. "Egad, I truly hope that by this time that

old head-devil of rebellion hath been caught and hanged! In the meantime, mistress, we do mistrust you slippery Carolinians and take certain precautions."

His anger seemed to afford her amusement. "Slippery?" she asked with an engaging smile.

"Aye, slippery!" he reiterated stubbornly.

"Art sure of it?"

"Very sure!"

She assumed an air of impatience. "We waste time parleying," she said briefly. "I have business to attend to. Command your man that he stand aside."

"Nay—I'm sorry—but you must come with me."

"Must? Did I hear aright? Did you say 'must'?"

"I did!"

"Then, good day, sir!"

During the last few words of the colloquy she had faced her restless horse toward the righthand fence. Now at a sudden touch from her lightly spurred heel the powerful animal crouched, leaped, and cleared the barrier. The lieutenant sprang forward; the soldier gaped for an instant, then lifted his musket.

"None of that!" cried the officer, turning and striking up the barrel.

In the meantime the horse had plunged heavily into the soft earth of the field, had recovered, and was galloping easily away. The girl, riding lightly and easily, turned her head and looked back over her shoulder. She waved a parting salute.

"Aye, we are slippery!" she mocked.

As the horse lengthened its stride, she began to sing.

"You may take the highroad an' I'll take the low,"

she trilled,

"but I'll be in Scotland afore ye."

Then her mount in one leap cleared the farther fence and she disappeared into the woods.

"Damn!" exclaimed the officer with a note of admiration in his voice. "Who'd have expected the wench—" With the unfinished sentence on his lips, he turned and went back to the group beneath the trees.

Every one of the party there was standing at a gaze, but neither the field nor the forest vouchsafed an answer to their questing eyes. The wind rippled the blades of the knee-high corn, a hawk screamed overhead, and a crow like a black pirate sailing an unruffled sea drifted across the blue vault of the sky.

For a moment all was silence, then the officer spoke.

"Poston," he demanded.

"Here sir." One of the homespun-clad individuals detached himself from his fellows.

"Do you know the wench?"

The man seemed to consider. He was not one to avow impulsively a knowledge of anything. Finally he spoke.

"Aye, well enough," he admitted. "'Tis but Ant'ney Fowler's gal. They live a short way beyond —whar the road crosses the branch. All hereabout knows her. Ant'ney's bedrid an' she runs the farm. 'Tis an odd pair. Mad Kate some calls her because of her risky ridin'."

"She is not really mad?"

"Sca'cely. She's smarter'n most, consequently we air a standin' here a-wonderin' whar she's agwine."

"Well, since the vixen has slipped us, suppose we investigate this Anthony. How is he disposed?"

"'Tis hard to say—him bein' bedrid an' Kate onlikely to bear arms on either side. Ant'ney's been a tough un in his day. Aye, man, he's tough yit an' wags a bitter tongue. But he's rougher in speech than he is in deed. Though he swears that he'll pay no tax, either to King or Congress, he ever hath a bit o' bread an' a sup o' rum for any wayfarer who stops at his door."

"Ah, say ye so. But the girl? She hath friends among the rebels? Or a lover, mayhap?"

"'Tis not likely. Dame Fowler died years ago. Since then, Ant'ney an' Kate have kept to themselves —not adzactly onneighborly with the folks hereabout, but in the main quiet and shut-mouthed. Ant'ney's queer—he doth not court attention and careth not to be questioned as to whence he came hither and why. But Dame Fowler, as I remember, were a lady and showed her breeding."

"They have not, then, meddled in politics?"

"Thus far; when a beef is stolen from his herd Ant'ney is apt to cuss with some potency both the Whigs and the Tories. 'Tis Kate, however, who manages the business an' runs the farm—no easy task in a time like this."

"I sh'd think not. Is she not afraid, with only a paralytic—?"

Poston laughed. "Ant'ney's sca'cely a lamb albeit he's abed," he explained. "He hath some lusty blacks, too, at his beck and call—huge, savage fellows apt with a knife or a poleaxe who know no law other than Ant'ney's will. As for Kate, she rides like a man, shoots like a man, and hath a tongue like a whiplash."

"Enough. Order the ranks, sergeant. We will march."

The men in uniform took their places and proceeded in an orderly column along the lane, their eyes to the front, their shoulders squared, their steps in unison. Behind them slouched the colonials. These latter walked bent forward, placed their feet cautiously and lightly, and as they advanced their roving eyes questioned ceaselessly the distant woods, the nearer brushwood, and even the adjacent fence corners. The soldiers were depending on their commander, the frontiersmen were looking out for themselves.

In the meantime Kate Fowler, having gained the shelter of the woods, checked her horse to a walk and presently guided him into a footpath which,

after descending into a ravine bordered with chinquapin and vines of the wild grape, emerged on a long ridge. In common with the road which she had so precipitately abandoned, this trail led also to the village of Ninety Six. Indeed she had profited by the exchange, since the sun shone hot in the highway but here in the dense shade the air was cooler. After proceeding a little way, she dropped her bridle rein on the neck of her mount, arranged her somewhat disordered hair, and considered her own waywardness.

There had been no real reason for her evasion of the officer. The British post of command was her destination. At the worst, the patrolling party would have but conducted her into the presence of the officer whom it was her purpose to see. But the air of authority assumed by the handsome young lieutenant had piqued her. She thought that town-bred young gentlemen need not affect such a superior attitude when in the presence of bucolic maidens. Also he interested her as no man ever had before. Therefore, wilfully and without consideration, she had been moved to some impressive action. Now, she smiled as she realized that he would certainly remember her.

A squirrel ran across the path, a slight breeze moved the overhanging leaves, the horse pricked up his ears and mended his pace. Ordinarily Kate was not given to self-analysis. Her present mood was foreign to her nature—until today she had been phys-

ically alert and emotionally indifferent. Essentially she was a woman of action. She shrugged her shoulders and gathered up her bridle reins.

Certainly men were not outside her experience. Really, she knew men better than she did women, liked them better, preferred their forthright ways to the indirections of her own sex. Her relations with men had always been on a business basis—open, direct, confined to the matter in hand. It is true that occasionally a rustic gallant had essayed a sigh or dared a compliment but all such had merely served as targets for her ready wit.

She was not thus invulnerable because of simplicity or ignorance—the functions of sex are fairly evident on a farm where stock-breeding is made a speciality. Moreover her environment was rude—both sexes were sturdily frank there in the backwoods where life was stark and where any exhibition of neurotic emotionalism was apt to meet the corrective of Homeric, or else Rabelaisian, laughter. Filth existed there undoubtedly, but it was known as filth and none thought to conceal it behind screens of philosophy or draperies of æstheticism.

The excellencies and the defects of her nativity were apparent in her. A year after her mother's death, she had backed her first unbroken colt. Old Anthony, who was not then quite so old, had watched the performance with an expression as near akin to fear as his harsh features would permit but, after she had conquered the animal, he shook the golden

rings in his ears, slapped his sturdy thighs, and delightedly pointed out to his attending servants that she was "Ant'ney's daughter! Ant'ney's daughter!"

She was Anthony's daughter—the color of her hair, her eyes, the shape of her nose, and the set of her chin proclaimed the fact—but she was her mother's daughter also. Kate remembered her mother—a Scottish woman, handsome, thrifty, and literate, who for some unknown reason found life satisfactory in a double log cabin in the backwoods of Carolina as the wife of Anthony Fowler. She must have been a woman of resolution to have married such a man at all—under any circumstances—in any environment.

Yet Anthony, save in point of residence, was not a true backwoodsman. There was about the man an odd flavor of the sea—something reminiscent of heaving decks, tropical hurricanes, and the purple islands of the Spanish seas. Even on his bed of affliction he swore strange and foreign oaths and larded his speech with nautical phrases, while a cutlass hung at the head of his bed and a brassbound pistol reposed beneath his pillow. Nor was he a mild-looking man—although recumbent and with a cotton nightcap on his head—nor did the large gold rings pendent from his hairy ears lend him an aspect of effeminacy. Indeed it was rumored in Ninety Six that Anthony had travelled abroad rather too much than too little, and that the gold in his ears, as well as that which had supplied him with slaves and with

land, had been mined with a cutlass rather than with a spade. Yea, there is gold in the sea and on the sea, and your freebooter of Anthony's day knew well one method of extracting it thence. It is no wonder that there was daring blood in the veins of his daughter.

Many dealings, before the war began, had this strange man had in the city of Charles Town but little was known there of his past—or if more were known, little was told. Indeed there were considerable merchants on East Bay whose businesses—or at least the beginnings of such—would not have borne too minute an inspection. The people of the young and growing port had come thither to better their fortunes. They were much too busy to inquire into the antecedents of a settler whose bills of exchange were promptly met, who brought good horses to their markets, and who gave the authorities no trouble.

Such being the attitude of the city, there was small likelihood that a newcomer would be subjected to any serious questioning in the neighborhood of Ninety Six. That section was, at the time of Anthony's advent, being rapidly filled with all classes and conditions of men—Scotch-Irish from the more northern colonies, adventurers from the seven seas, fugitives from the law, time-expired redemptioners, and much of the riffraff set adrift from the armies in Europe by the latest peace treaty. Under such conditions, it is incumbent that each man mind his own business and endeavor to take care of that which is

his—tasks for which Anthony Fowler was entirely competent.

Near this village, consequently, he had builded his house, cleared his fields, and set his slaves their tasks. Here he had lived for twenty years and here his daughter had grown to womanhood. Here age had crept upon him until his lower limbs had failed him and his bed had claimed him as a permanent occupant. But neither age nor disability had weakened his spirit. He was a chained eagle, circumscribed as to his sphere of action but still fierce and indomitable.

It was of none of these things that Kate was thinking as her horse made his way along the path through the forest. Her preoccupation was with matters less remote. For a girl of her years, her task was not an inconsiderable one. On her resourcefulness and foresight depended the future of Fowler's farm and the welfare of its inhabitants. The unsettled state of the country had closed the ordinary channels of trade—no markets existed. The farm produced the necessary food and the women-slaves spun and wove, but a certain amount of ready money was desirable—even necessary, if the more civilized comforts of life be not wholly foregone. Iron, also, from which to forge implements was not to be had for the asking.

Otherwise than in this material way, the dispute between the King and his colonies had scarcely affected the Fowlers. Indeed, except in the very beginning when Williamson and the Cunninghams had

clashed only a mile or two away at Savage's plantation, the struggle had but slightly affected the neighborhood. Some persons, it is true, called themselves Whigs and others were known as Tories but all were neighbors whose differences, up to this point, had been as largely theoretical as those of ordinary political parties. It was only later that the settlers abandoned themselves to the bloody savagery of internecine warfare.

Had he been physically able, Kate's father might have chosen the side of the king; and then, again, he might not. As it was, he damned the King and the Provincial Congress quite impartially and, as Poston told the lieutenant, swore that he would pay taxes to neither. This attitude did not offend his neighbors. They also paid no taxes, or at least paid them in the smallest possible degree. As for the tea and the stamped paper about which other sections had become excited, the people of Ninety Six drank no tea except that brewed from sassafras roots and quite a number of them could make no use of paper in any form.

The energetic Kate thought that the coming of the King's garrison to Ninety Six would solve her financial problem. The farm produced cattle, swine, poultry, breadstuffs, and vegetables and she knew that the soldiers would stand in need of such. Moreover the British commander would pay for such supplies in "hard money," which was much more desirable than the depreciated paper currency which

the province was issuing. She was on her way, therefore, to the village for the purpose of obtaining from the officer in command the passes and permits necessary to such sales as she might be able to make. The politics of the day did not concern her and her meeting with the patrol had been wholly fortuitous.

Her adventure with the young officer had introduced into this current of practical thought an alien element. Again and again the picture that he had made as he stood bowing with his shako at his breast obtruded itself upon her and diverted her mind from its principal purpose. In her secluded existence she had met but few men of such quality. She found herself wondering who he was and whence he had come. She half regretted running away from him.

Thus buried in her reflections, she came at last to the end of the trail and the village lay before her. The scene was a busy one, for Balfour was already engaged in the task of making the post secure. At her left, on the crest of an adjoining hill, men were building a new earthwork which was later to become famous as the Star Redoubt. Before her other men were repairing the stockaded way that led across the valley, in which depression there rose a spring of clear water and through which there flowed a streamlet. Further along stood the town proper—also stockaded. The village was a compact one, the houses being grouped about a stone jail and a hewn-log courthouse. High above the courthouse towered a newly-erected flagstaff at whose peak, catching the

sunlight on its crimson folds, the proud banner of England flew.

The young woman made her way into the town without interruption. She found the streets crowded. The red coats of the British Regulars were mingled with the green ones of the "Queen's Own" Americans. Among the civilians there was homespun in plenty and some broadcloth. The faces of the latter were bright with exultation, for it was a day of triumph for the Tories. Here and there some Whig, too proud to recant but too wise to oppose, passed by with averted eyes. The girl even saw a blue Provincial uniform—perhaps that of General Williamson or of Colonel Pickens who, conceiving themselves included in the surrender of Charles Town, had come in to take their paroles from Colonel Balfour. But the most vociferous of those who celebrated were the recent converts to Toryism who now sought by zeal for the King to cover a recent similar enthusiasm for a certain blue flag with a crescent.

This enthusiasm which Kate Fowler witnessed was not to last. Later, Pickens, infuriated by the burning of his barns, broke the parole which he was now giving and fought anew and "with a halter 'round his neck"; and many of those who were now applauding slipped away and joined the partisans. But today this was not to be foreseen. The King's army was in possession of South Carolina, and Cornwallis was garrisoning every strategic point. It was a gala day in Ninety Six.

But Cornwallis could not garrison the forests. About his fortified posts, mile after mile, stretched the shaggy woodland. Many things hid and harbored under this mighty blanket of green—deer, bear, catamounts and hunted men. The forest might be penetrated but it could not be conquered save by the titanic efforts of many men through many years. For the present it kept its secrets well.

Standing before the courthouse, waiting her turn to interview Colonel Cruger, Kate Fowler could see below her the long, fertile, cultivated valley of John's Creek. Beyond the valley rose rolling hills, but she could not see the hills because of the forest. Cornwallis could not garrison that forest. His general's inability cost the English King his province of South Carolina.

CHAPTER II

THE squad of soldiers, the sergeant and the officer leading and the three wary countrymen bringing up the rear, halted in front of the gate in the rude picket fence which surrounded Anthony Fowler's dwelling. Contrary to the custom of the countryside, the house did not occupy a hilltop but was situated in a shallow valley through which there flowed a little brawling brook. The house, built of squared logs heavy enough to withstand the blows of a battering ram, was low and rambling, having received additions, apparently, from time to time. Along the whole front ran a low veranda. At the rear of the main building, there was, on one side, a vegetable garden and cabins for the negroes, on the other, barns and outbuildings; while beyond the barns there was a stretch of fenced pasture land with cows, horses, and sheep grazing within the enclosure.

The officer examined the surroundings with interest. Although there was nothing here that could compare with the great plantation seats of the gentry of the lower country or even with the lesser farmsteads of the more northern colonies yet, in spite of the crudeness of the buildings, everywhere there was evidence of comforts and conveniences not to be found in the ordinary backwoods cabin. Already the

soldiers were eyeing the abundant poultry with calculating interest.

Their commander, however, gave them no present opportunity for foraging. Bidding the sergeant hold the detail in ranks, he unlatched the gate and proceeded toward the veranda. No sound greeted his advance—even the ubiquitous dogs of the usual settler's cabin seemed here to be absent. Only a cuckoo —a raincrow—hidden somewhere in the treetops gave vent to its sighing, sobbing note. This unusual quiet disturbed the young man somewhat.

But as he reached the wooden steps and began to ascend, a great, roaring voice broke forth.

"Cæsar! Raz! Dewberry!— Wake, you black hellions and stand by! Some one's out in the front!"

Almost immediately the lieutenant heard sounds of running feet and suddenly three huge negroes plunged into sight.

"Ai-ee, Massa!" shouted one of them. "Buckra man een de po'ch an' sojers sta-an at we gate!"

"So?" replied the voice truculently. "Then throttle each soldier that enters the yard and send the white man in."

At the first alarm the officer had unsheathed his sword and the sergeant had started for the gate. In the case of the latter, however, the man called Poston had interfered.

"Wait a bit, man," the Tory had advised, "else Ant'ney may shoot fust an' inquire atterwards. He's none so bad if rightly handled.—Halloo, Cæsar!"

This to the negro who showed his teeth in a grin of recognition.

In the meantime the officer crossed the veranda and found himself in an open hallway. Then a door opened and he stepped back startled. The negress who confronted him was old—so old that her woolly hair was yellowish white, her eyelids red-rimmed and everted, her lips pendulous, while the fleshless skin of her sagging cheeks hung below her nether jaw like the dewlaps of an animal. In vivid contrast to all this was the soundness and whiteness of her strong teeth, the vigor of her movements, and the unquenchable fire that burned in her eyes.

Grunting unintelligibly, she crossed the hall, opened another door and signalled him to enter.

As unusual as was the appearance of the black woman, John Maclae was still unprepared for the strange figure which he now beheld lying on a bed in the room. Propped up by pillows, his legs covered by a blue counterpane, one gaunt, hairy hand exposed and the other hidden beneath the covering, was the large-framed, bony wreck of a once powerful man. The eyes of the invalid were sunken far back into cavernous sockets; his hair, iron-gray and overlong, but partially concealed the glittering yellow rings that hung from his earlobes; his face was furrowed and seamed—the years had ploughed it, pain and exposure had harrowed it, and scars, long healed, disfigured it. Notwithstanding all this, there remained in those deep eyes and that derelict frame

some aura of force—some air of authority that is only bred by a lifelong habit of command.

"Put up your iron," the voice rumbled—the amazed intruder still held his naked sword in his hand— "Had I meant to harm ye, I'd have shot ye as ye stepped in."

At the words Maclae lifted his head haughtily but sheathed his weapon.

"And if you had drawn," he retorted sternly, "you would have died for it, crippled though you are. I have a file of infantry without."

The man on the bed laughed harshly. Seemingly the irritation of the younger man pleased him. "A file of infantry," he scoffed. "And of what importance, pray, is a file of infantry? I have seen the time, my fledgling, when with but two or three of my blacks I'd have engaged to hold this house against a full company of your stupid footsloggers. Even now, pegged here to my bed, I could show ye a pretty trick or two— But I forget myself. I have no quarrel with ye. I am, in a sense, your host although, in faith, ye are present on short invitation."

The lieutenant throttled his rising wrath and bowed stiffly. "My name is Maclae," he began. "I am an officer of the King seeking intelligence—"

"I can draw an inference," interrupted the other with a more courteous inflection. "Pray pardon my vaporing—'tis but a deliquum from old, ill habits. But my days of strife have passed. What have I to do with the King and his quarrels, or what with

Gadsden and his troop of mechanic malcontents, or what even with Rutledge and his following of would-be aristocrats yonder in Charles Town? All these concern me not, and I ask but to die in peace—Be seated, sir. Amelie! Some wine—the Madeira!—'Tis reported here that your Sir Henry Clinton hath laid Lincoln very neatly by the heels. The New Englander was a fool to allow himself to be bottled up. In his place I'd have taken to the open and Clinton would have had me when he catched me. But the blunder was, no doubt, due to politics—Charles Town politics thinking, as usual, only of the city. Charles Town—" He hesitated and for a moment seemed to brood. "After all, why should I care?" he resumed. "Always they used me and then cozened me of most of my share."

The negress, who on Maclae's entrance had followed him into the room, had risen, at the command of her master, from the stool upon which she had seated herself and had shuffled out. Now, in some more distant part, she could be heard shuffling about.

"I may account you, then, a loyal subject," suggested Maclae, somewhat mollified by the turn the conversation had taken.

"That is as it pleaseth you," returned the other. "We have naught of interest in the quarrel, Kate and I."

"Ye can scarcely have failed to be affected by it, none the less."

"Aye, we have been pestered occasionally, but not

beyond endurance," admitted the invalid. "There are in this neighborhood many idle knaves who are either Whigs or Tories as occasion for plunder offers, but all such in these parts know me and, knowing me, use me with some discretion. My balance in the hands of Life, the usurer, is small; that of him who would contend with me always seems to himself large. Why, in any deadly matter, should such a one care to throw the dice with me? Aye, they pester me—but with discretion, as I have said."

"I fancy that you will be pestered no further," remarked Maclae soothingly. "At long last the King, in this Province at least, hath come unmistakably into his own. Ninety Six is heavily garrisoned and henceforward in these parts the King's law will protect the King's subjects.—But, pray you sir, are you the father—?"

"What! Did ye meet Kate?"

"I did. It was my duty to take her into custody—"

"Where is she?" Again there was the low rumble of menace in the old man's voice and the hand beneath the coverlet moved.

The negress, who was just returning to the room with the wine, stopped short and threw a quick, questioning glance at the bed. But the invalid frowned slightly and shook his head. "Leave it to me!" he warned her impatiently.

Maclae, a little puzzled by this byplay, glanced from one to the other. "I don't know where she is," he answered slowly. "Truly 'tis a bit humiliat-

ing to have to confess so much. I merely intended to escort her to headquarters, but—"

"But she did not care for the escort, belike?"

"Perhaps not— Very neatly she gave us the slip."

"How?" The tension had visibly relaxed.

Maclae made a wry face, but taking a wineglass from Amelie's proffered tray began to sip the contents slowly and with considerable appreciation.

" 'Tis little to my credit that I was so readily befooled," he remarked. "My reputation for astuteness will suffer damnably when the tale reaches headquarters."

"Ye're over young to possess a reputation," commented Anthony disarmingly.

"Sir," interrupted Poston, appearing in the doorway.

"What is it?" snapped out the lieutenant.

"The sergeant wishes to know if the men may take their ease."

"Stap me! I had forgotten— Certainly, Poston."

"Is that you, Saul?" queried Anthony from his bed. "Do you bid Cæsar take your party some rum and water. And be sure to warn the sergeant to keep his men in the road—my blacks have been ordered to withstand intruders. . . . An arrant rogue, yon, but sometimes amusing," he added as Poston disappeared.

"You know him, then."

"He is well known hereabout. He hath the reputation of harvesting corn from his neighbors' cribs.

'Tis said that he hath graduated in horestealing and carries his diploma, in the form of thirty nine lashes on his bare back. But ye were speaking of Kate— She outwitted ye, the vixen?"

"Neatly, neatly! Even as I was speaking to her, she put her mount at the fence, cleared it handsomely, and galloped away. I could not fire on a woman and none of us were mounted."

" 'Twould not have served ye had ye all been mounted," observed Anthony. "I have yet to see the horse that can outdistance Bullet in rough ground."

"I trust that you will cause her to report herself. Otherwise—"

"She hath already reported herself no doubt," rejoined Anthony carelessly. "She was on her way to headquarters when she met ye."

"Then why—?"

"Mayhap there was some small air of compulsion about ye," suggested the other dryly. "The girl hath my nature and doth not abide hectoring."

" 'Twas my wish to use her courteously— But I have lingered overlong," said the officer rising. "I trust that I may report the household well-affected toward the King's troops."

"We wish the King's troops no ill," replied Fowler with an air of formality. "Kate, even now, hath gone to arrange for their victualling. For a fair return, we will be pleased to supply them as we

are able. As for the rest, the less we see of them the better we'll be pleased."

"At least you'll drink to the King?" laughed Maclae as he poured a few drops of wine into the invalid's glass and refilled his own.

"Aye," rumbled the old man. "Here's to the King and Ant'ney Fowler. May each mind his own business!"

Contenting himself perforce with this rather equivocal toast, Maclae took his leave. The negress, as he departed, rose from her stool, passed to the window, and watched silently as the patrol marched away. After the squad had disappeared, she turned, repossessed herself of the wine and the glasses, and prepared to leave the room. Anthony's voice halted her.

"Amelie!"

She replaced the silver waiter on a table—an ornate table, it was, and one much out of place in such a rude dwelling—then faced him.

"What had ye in mind just now?"

She answered him, speaking rapidly in a queer dialect in which French phrases and English were oddly mingled. Her eyes gleamed with a cruel light. She hesitated, then repeated her words more insistently.

Anthony shook his head. "Aye," he commented. "That ye could have accomplished it, I well understand. A few drops in the wineglass and a spoonful

in the grog—'twere childish simple. But 'twould not have served. Think ye that the disappearance of the entire patrol would not have set on foot a searching inquiry?"

The woman croaked again and again the invalid shook his head. "No," he went on, " 'twas unthinkable. Besides, Kate is safe enough."

The negress demurred. A spasm of apprehension seemed to convulse her. Her eyes grew redder, her fists clenched themselves, and there poured from her lips a veritable volley of uncouth suspicions.

"Nay," replied the invalid, withdrawing for the first time the hand that had been hidden by the coverlet and revealing the firearm in its grasp. "An the girl had been harmed, I'd have pistolled him in his chair."

Amelie replied, again voicing her distrust. As she croaked, the flesh of her flabby jaws seemed to swell as does the hood of a cobra. In picturesque phrases she branded Maclae as a libertine and a liar.

"No, you're wrong," reiterated her master. "He told the truth. Had he have framed the tale, 'twould have been more to his credit—Cæsar!"

The gigantic negro came shuffling down the hallway, appeared in the room, and stood.

"Of what did yon squad of greencoats speak as ye served them the rum?"

The negro grinned reminiscently. "Dey larf at

dey orf'cer, Massa," he answered. "Missy Kate, she mek fool of um."

Anthony looked at Amelie. "You see," he said with finality, then dismissed both blacks with a wave of his hand. Amelie went away grumbling.

The invalid followed the negroes with his eyes as they went away. The interlude was over—the four gray walls of his room shut out the world again. He turned his head in order that he might see from his window the familiar stretch of road, the high-reaching trees, the little brook, the long shadows cast by the afternoon sun. These things were all there—everything other than himself remained unchanged.

A sense of unreality pressed itself upon him. It seemed to him that the gaunt body pinned to the bed was in no sense the true Anthony Fowler; that this was something that the real Anthony had but used and had worn out in the using. It had been a good implement but it had served its turn and now it was worthless. Surely, somewhere there was a new instrument—a new garment—a new tool—ready for his service. It seemed incredible that the real Anthony, that vital personality which had so often scorned, mocked, and motivated the bodily Anthony, could simply go out like the flame of a candle—could vanish into nothingness—could lose its intense awareness of itself and its surroundings.

He dozed, dreamed a little, then woke again. It

was odd, he thought, how years afterward, one relived in dreams his past experiences. That outlandish jabber of Amelie's must have stirred his memory. How the years had slipped by since that night when he first encountered Amelie! Time! Was even time a reality? It must be, for he was old and Amelie was old, yet tonight an ageless moon would shine on ageless shore, there far to the south, and the wavelets—ah well!

He lifted his great, gristly hands and examined them. They looked, he reflected, like the hands of those great apes which he had seen when his ship had been lying off the African coast, except that the skin of his own had grown paper-thin so that the veins stood out like knotted blue cords. The apes—the yellow sands—the hot, moist, stinking breeze that came off the riverflats! The very recollection of them oppressed him. He moved his head impatiently. His pulses seemed to echo the monotonous beat of a witchdoctor's drum. Again he closed his eyes.

When he reopened them, he thrust his telltale hands out of sight beneath the coverlet. Why expose such grim reminders? Why remember?

Amelie now— Why think of Amelie as other than a faithful, trusted servant? What was wrong this afternoon that such old thoughts—old thoughts and blurred memories—kept recurring and troubling him? The Recording Angel— Some day the Recording Angel would turn out to be one's own memory

unrolling before one like a vast panorama all one's deeds and desires from the very beginning of time to the end of time. The Recording Angel! He laughed harshly at the thought of hardbitten old Anthony Fowler lying on his bed considering the angels.

A third time his eyelids drooped. A bluebottle fly drummed lazily against the window, the raincrow complained, the wind rustled through the glazed leaves of the wateroaks. In a little while, all these things ceased to be—the broken body, the bed, the room, the sound of the wind in the trees.

It grew dark, it was night, and Anthony Fowler was a strong man again—a strong man and a daring one, who walked on a tropical strand and listened as the whitecapped waves curled gently and broke at his feet. Behind him were the lights of a city, which he knew to be a subtle city full of devious ways and slippery folk, and he smiled in the knowledge that his own wit was superior to the craftiness of those others back there. In the distance there rose mountains and before this city, which he knew to be Port-au-Prince in Hayti, there ebbed and flowed the tides of the sea. A mile out in the roadstead in front of the town his lugger lay ready to sail.

But he had not yet gone aboard. Three hours before he had finished landing his goods. They had been landed silently and secretly at the foot of a street, within a half-mile of the customhouse. His last boat had gone back to the vessel but he had

made his way through the streets and had stopped at a wineshop on the outskirts—there was one there whom it was necessary to see. This business finished, he had wandered away along the shore. Why he chose that course he could not say. Perhaps it was safer outside the town, perhaps not so safe—who could say? But he had appointed a rendezvous and presently the boat would call for him.

He walked along and the beach lay like a sickle of sand lying white between the sea and the jungle. On his right was the bay, with its myriad wavelets all silver-tipped by the moonlight. Beyond these, a dark silhouette against the western sky, the lugger swung with the tide.

To the left the beach merged into a tangle of palms, lianas, and luxuriant underbrush—the massed vegetation which only the tropics can breed—which in its turn yielded to the slant upward loom of the higher, forested land. It was lonely there—the silence was broken only by the ripple of the water—the moon rode high, the stars shone like pale, steady lights.

Suddenly he became aware of a sound. He listened. From far to the landward there came the slow, punctuated baying of a hound.

He was interested. He had heard the like before. Some one—a slave or a criminal, very likely both in the same person—had escaped. He recalled that the idlers in the wineshop had been gossiping about something of the sort. They had spoken of the death,

by poison, of a planter. The poisoner—a negress—had fled the town, they said, and was being pursued. In fancy, he pictured the breathless, hurrying woman and the great dog picking out her trail slowly but with the inevitableness of fate. He stood for a moment and marked the rapid progress of the hound. Then he walked on.

A moment later something crashing through the underbrush startled him. He stopped short, drew his dagger, and braced himself for a stroke. There were pistols in his pockets, but pistols are noisy and his business had been such as to render him unwilling to attract attention to himself. Besides moonlight is a deceptive thing rendering a firearm uncertain, while a dagger is silent and sure.

Just in front of him, a figure had broken cover—a gigantic woman, it seemed. She gave him but a fleeting glance, then crossed in front of him, ran a little way through the shallows, and cast herself desperately into the sea.

He plunged after her—why, he could not tell. Possibly some unwonted access of pity, possibly cupidity since negroes were valuable. More likely it was a mere automatic reaction—at any rate the unexpectedness of the event forbade a conning of reasons. He swam a few strokes and came up with her. Evading her drowning clutches, he seized her deftly from behind, his fingers locking themselves into the collar of her shift. She struggled and groped for him but she could not reach him, for he swam

at arm's length and choked her unmercifully.

Thus for a few moments he kept afloat. As he was considering his situation, he heard voices and the rattle of oars. His boat, on its way to take him off, had been attracted to this spot by the commotion in the water. He hailed it.

"I've caught me a nigger," he remarked as his men hauled them aboard. "She'll fetch a good price in Charles Town."

He awoke with a start. For the moment, all his surroundings appeared unreal. The boat, the sailors, Amelie, the sea—all these seemed to him more tangible than was the bed whereon he lay and the drab walls that rose about him. Little by little the present assumed its usual dominance. A sigh broke from his lips. He realized that he was both old and ill.

He recalled that he had not sold the woman in Charles Town—he had kept her in his own service. She had proved useful. She was an excellent cook, she was alert to his interests, and she had a marvellous knowledge of simples—of healing potions and of blighting potions. Amelie!

All this so long ago? . . . Nay, all this—all this— Why, what a brief life it is that one man's bones can bear! He turned again to the window. He could scarcely have told whether he had dreamed or had remembered. The shadows were growing long.

The clatter of a horse's hooves broke the silence.

He heard Cæsar speaking, then Kate. A gate creaked as it opened and closed. There were footsteps in the hall.

"Well father?"

The girl stood in the doorway. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks were flushed. There was an air of satisfaction in her carriage.

"Are ye back, Kate? How fared ye?"

"Famously. I have Cruger's pass and his permission to traffic." She came forward, sat down on the side of the bed, and fondled his hand.

"I hear ye had adventures by the way."

"Yes? Did the patrol visit ye? They stopped me, indeed, but I could not tarry. How liked ye their officer?"

"He pleased me as well as any, once it was clear that ye had diddled him. Did ye find the cub presumptuous?"

"On the contrary. But he appeared so well pleased with himself."

Anthony laughed. Amelie, who had followed her mistress into the room, began anew to express her disapproval of soldiers who halted travellers and entered houses uninvited.

"Batten down your hatches, Amelie," ordered the old man.

"No let her talk," countermanded Kate. "I am amused that ye both still regard me as a child."

The negress mumbled a half-dozen additional sentences.

"Avast," reiterated Anthony. "Belike we've seen the last of the young cockerel. Tell me, Kate; what heard ye in the village?"

The sun was setting—its red rays gilded the tops of the trees.

CHAPTER III

COLONEL BALFOUR sat in his office in the log courthouse at Ninety Six and considered the military situation. This was not to his liking. It was now June, 1780. In May, when Sir Henry Clinton left Charles Town to return to New York, South Carolina had appeared to be safely repossessed by the royal troops. There was no longer a government left in the so-called state. Most of the members of the Provincial Congress, as well as the other government officials, were on parole or in confinement. And certainly there were no military forces, other than those of the King, in existence in the province. Charles Town's brief period of independence seemed to have reached an inglorious end and to the troubles of the city the back country appeared apathetic.

But John Rutledge, the provisional governor, had escaped to North Carolina and wherever John Rutledge happened to be there too was the state government—under his hat. Once there was a Roman who was honored because he "had not despaired of the Republic." South Carolina would do well to engrave that saying on a monument to Rutledge. Though he was hunted from the province, he carried with him live coals from the altar of resistance—

coals from which the torches of the partisan leaders were again and again relighted.

All the efforts of Rutledge, however, might have been in vain had it not been that his persuasions were reinforced by British cupidity and blundering. Until the fall of Charles Town the province had been noted for its wealth—it was not for nothing that in the old days the comings and goings of the privateers and pirates of the Spanish Main had been winked at. The British soldiery lusted for the riches among which they found themselves. There was gold and silver plate in the homes of the planters—the conquerors appropriated it; there were fine horses in the paddocks—they commandeered these as mounts for their cavalry; there were many valuable slaves living on the plantations—they herded these into transports and resold them in the West Indies. But all of this might not have been fatal—since the country about Charles Town, where the principal booty was to be had, was held in a grip of iron—had Cornwallis forborne the ultimate folly.

It was Sir Henry Clinton's plan that, as soon as Lord Cornwallis had thoroughly pacified South Carolina, the latter should march north through North Carolina and Virginia to join the former in Baltimore. It was Cornwallis's idea, in the furtherance of this plan, to arm the loyal inhabitants, form them into military commands, and use them to hold the country in his rear, thus freeing his regular troops for the expected northern march.

This would have been excellent strategy had it not been such poor politics.

The upper country, contrary to the lower and with the exception of a few individuals, had been markedly lukewarm in the cause of independence—the attitude of Anthony Fowler being characteristic rather than exceptional. The people of this section felt no great love for the city of Charles Town. Indeed the great majority of them had not even entered the province through that port but had come south, along the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains, from the frontiers of Pennsylvania and Virginia. Neither had they any deep quarrel with a King of whom they seldom heard and whose laws were effective upon them in inverse proportion to the distance separating them from him. All they asked of royalty was to be let alone.

Under the circumstances it was inevitable, as soon as Cornwallis had established his interior posts and had issued his initial proclamations, that these people would hasten to make their peace with the powers that existed and to take the oath of allegiance to King George III. But after they had done this, they were coolly informed that they were now to be drafted into regiments in order that they might assist in fighting the King's battles. They felt no desire to fight the King's battles; they said so; and they took to the woods. Cornwallis was unable to garrison the forest.

Now, although the back country people troubled

themselves but slightly concerning Charles Town, they had experienced in the past some very real difficulties of their own. Some fifteen or twenty years before, the only courts at the time being located in the city and Justice in the backwoods being not only blind but asleep, some of the turbulent and unscrupulous among the population had organized themselves into bands for the purpose of "reaping where they had not sown and gathering where they had not strewn." Horses and cattle, being self-transportable, were the principal prey of these marauders but other movables were often taken nor did the thieves hesitate if murder was necessary to the accomplishment of their purposes.

For a time this infliction endured, but after a short season of irresolution the honester folk rose in wrath, took the law into their own hands, captured the robbers, hanged a few, whipped a great number, and put the fear of the Lord into the remainder. In this way the matter had been ended for a time, but those who had been forced into honesty could still hate and be hated.

Smarting from their punishment none the less because it was merited, these free-traders in other men's goods saw in the new turn of affairs a heaven-sent opportunity for recoupment and revenge. Consequently they made haste to present themselves to the British commanders and were loud in their protestations of loyalty. Many of these fellows, too,

previous to coming to South Carolina, had seen service in European armies and all enlisted themselves as members of the forces of the King. Later they were sent to bring in the remainder of the available men and to harass those who refused to come. Naturally, in this business, they did not overlook any one against whom they harbored a grudge.

This was the state of affairs which was the occasion of Colonel Balfour's concern. Although his stay at Ninety Six had been brief, he had already learned enough of the temper of these backwoodsmen to dread any reopening of the old accounts or a resumption of the old quarrels. Yet Cornwallis had ordered that recruiting the provincials into the King's service should be energetically prosecuted and had sent Colonel Patrick Ferguson into the interior for the specific purpose of assembling and drilling the new levies. In view of these perplexities it was a relief to Balfour that he had already received orders recalling him to Charles Town. Within a few days he must proceed to the city to take active command of the garrison there. Cruger, who was succeeding him at Ninety Six, would inherit the up-country problem.

His cogitation was cut short by the appearance of his orderly who ushered Kate Fowler into the room. Balfour arose and bowed.

"A charming vision, egad," he remarked gallantly, "and one most welcome to a lonely soldier."

Kate laughed. "Spare your compliments, Colonel," she advised. "I am but come to annoy you with a complaint."

"No one so fair could possibly annoy me."

"Wait and see. I have in the past week lost six ducks, three geese, and a hive of bees."

"Nay, do not regret the bees. You need no more of sweetness."

"Perhaps not; but you do, and if this thieving continues you'll have no more honey for your table —nor poultry either."

"You alarm me. Am I to be starved? Pray state what it is that I must do in order to avoid such grave discomfort."

"You must keep your men within bounds and outside my enclosures; otherwise I will not be answerable for their safety. Indeed, I believe that I sprinkled one of your rascals with shot from my fowlingpiece no longer since than yestere'en."

"Say you so?" queried Balfour with a more serious air. " 'Twas a sharp lesson, but merited. Think you that you'd be able to recognize the fellow?"

" 'Tis hardly possible. It was growing dark when the goose squalled; and the distance was considerable. But as the knave in his flight crossed our pasture fence, I had him for an instant against the skyline and I do not often miss. Had I sped a bullet instead of smallshot, the King's tally might well have been one soldier short."

"An irregular, surely," commented Balfour. "One

of your countrymen, Mistress, seeking more worthy meat than our poor commissary doth afford. Our proper troops are kept to their barracks and not allowed to roam, but these fellows in homespun—Ah, I recall that we do have an injured man amongst them. 'Tis a fellow called Poston from whose shoulder our surgeon hath removed a few pellets such as you describe. But, if we give credit to his story, he met malcontents in the woods, six of them. He put the party to flight after wounding one and being wounded in his turn as he withstood them. He hath received from me a broad piece to reward his courage."

"Without doubt Saul Poston met one of my geese," remarked Kate dryly, "and was caught by the swan shot from a woman's fusee. I would ye had kept the broad piece that ye might pay me for my fowl."

Balfour's face reddened. "Ye shall be paid, Mistress Fowler," he asserted, "and so shall the knave who hath so scurvily tricked me. By'r Lady, as soon as his shoulder is healed I'll lash him to a cart wheel with a lanyard and lace him nine and thirty times with the cat!"

"Nay," objected Kate. "I pray you that you will do nothing of the kind. This man Poston is of our neighborhood and, at times, hath shown some desert. I do admit him to be without diffidence in the acquiring of eatables and like enough, some day, to ride the gaunt horse that was foaled by an acorn;

but 'tis not becoming that I should bring harm to him. What say you, Colonel—if I abate my claim for the goose will you forbear his punishment?"

"Eh? What? How then am I to sustain my authority over these unruly rustics, if I suffer this to pass?"

"I am no simpleton, Colonel. Your authority here rests on none so slight a base. Sir, I beg that you will oblige me in this."

"At least we'll have the rascal in and confound him with his lies," conceded Balfour. "Six whigs indeed!"

"It was not to punish the thief that brought me here," continued Kate. "In fact, my fowlingpiece hath sufficiently accomplished it. I came, rather, to seek your aid in some plan to end these depredations."

"You shall not be annoyed further," Balfour assured her. "I shall post a guard at the farm provided that ye can spare a barn to shelter the men and will quarter the officer whom I shall send with them."

"As you please," replied Kate. "I can readily provide a barn and straw, and we will lodge and victual your officer."

"That is settled then," agreed the Colonel rapping on the table with his knuckles until an orderly appeared.

He turned to the man. "Send Lieutenant Maclae to me," he directed, "and bid the guards search the

pothouses and arrest me one Poston, a private of Dunlap's."

The orderly saluted and went out. A moment later Maclae appeared. Having saluted his commander, he bowed to the lady, his handsome face reddening with embarrassment as he recognized her.

"May I meet better fortune, Mistress," he murmured, "in this our second encounter."

"Is not your fortune already sufficient, in that you do meet me again?" queried she with obvious raillery.

"You two have already met?" inquired the Colonel with a trace of amusement.

"Indeed yes," admitted Maclae. "But in my opinion the lady parted from me with some abruptness."

Balfour questioned Kate with his eyes.

"I did but encounter him in the road," she explained, "and, not being favored with either his acquaintance or his intentions, let him see the heels of my horse."

"His intentions!" laughed the Colonel. "Egad, that's good. An' ye wish it, Mistress Kate, he shall declare his intentions at once."

"Nay, 'tis too late," laughed Kate in return. "The gentleman hath had an opportunity and hath pursued it with too little diligence."

" 'Twas not zeal to pursue, I lacked, but sheer ability," smiled Maclae. "I vow ye are both too swift for me—the one in body and the other in wit."

"Ye must know each other," said Balfour with

a return to gravity. "It is he, Mistress Kate, whom I shall post at the farm."

"I shall feel very safe," mocked she, "when guarded by so fierce a warrior."

"I make no doubt that I might dare boldly in a fair cause," retorted Maclae bowing.

"A truce!" begged Balfour, as he picked up a pen and scribbled an order. "Mr. Maclae," he continued, as he passed the paper to the lieutenant, "you will take a sergeant and six men and establish an advanced post on the premises of Anthony Fowler. You will guard the farmhouse and its environs, halt and examine all passers between the town and the river, and send me from time to time such information as you may be able to collect. That is all, sir."

The young man saluted, bowed to Kate, and turned away. But as he went out, he glanced back at the girl.

"May the gods indulge me, Mistress," he said, "and grant me your better acquaintance."

"No doubt, since we shall be housed together, your gods will answer you with their accustomed liberality," she smiled.

The episode was ended by Maclae's disappearance and the enforced entrance of Poston, who was now thrust into the room by two soldiers of the guard.

Balfour regarded the tory sardonically. "Hail to the hero!" he said with a sneer.

The newcomer was clad only in his shirt and

trousers, the sleeve of the upper garment being cut away to accommodate an arm swathed in a blood-stained bandage. With his uninjured member he pulled his cap to Kate, then turned to the officer.

"Ye wished to see me, Colonel?" he inquired with an easy air of innocence.

Balfour waved a hand. "Behold, Mistress Kate," he proclaimed ironically, "our putter-to-flight of rebels—and of geese! 'Tis said that when a fat bird is placed afore him, it beginneth at once to move toward his hands."

"Nay, not so!" objected the irregular hardily. "I'll not deny that a fat goose maketh a comfortable meat—would I had the leg of one, roasted! Did ye think to purchase a goose, Colonel? 'Tis a comfortable fowl."

Balfour thumped with his fist the table at which he was seated. "How dared ye, rogue, to cozen me with so gross a lie?" he demanded.

The countryman affected bewilderment. "Cozen ye, Colonel?" he questioned. Then he turned to Kate. "Hath he been drinking, Mistress? Mayhap the liquor, not liking to be crowded, goes to his head."

Balfour half rose from his chair. "Ah, ye would be insolent!" he interjected sternly. "But it doth not avail ye. You know well the occasion of my displeasure. Ye report to me a certain conflict with outlying and disaffected men, and I discover that, instead of in honorable combat, ye have had your hide

peppered while stealing poultry. What have ye to say?"

"I have spoken too freely," acknowledged the irregular, "Samson being not the only man who hath done damage with the jawbone of an ass. And yet I have not lied—that is to say, not wholly. Ye had the packhorse of the party which I encountered, did ye not? Ye inspected its accouterments? Ye found thus and thus of coarse provision and of powder and ball?"

Balfour turned to Kate. "He did bring in the horse," he admitted.

Kate directed a glance at the culprit. "As well as my goose and a few of my swanshot, eh Saul?" she suggested.

"Now, Mistress Kate," the man remonstrated, "to expose too much of the truth were unwholesome for me. Besides, I think too great an expenditure of so rare a commodity to be unthrifty. Also, who can say with certainty when he speaketh the whole truth —in such delicate matters 'twere better the feet slip than the tongue. Feeling thus 'tis my custom to withhold somewhat. For any trenching upon your fowlyard, I do profess remorse; na'th'less, I vow I find the distress of remorse less keen than the distress of fasting."

"Ye're a gross sinner, Saul," she commented humorously, "as well as something loquacious. But, to one so grievously emburdened, it may be that one more sin is imperceptible.—Colonel, since Poston

will lack for some days the comfort of a whole skin, I beg that in this matter ye will afflict him no further."

" 'Tis well," grumbled Balfour, "that the rogue hath the services of so fair a petitioner." He turned to the tory. "You are released," he announced. "Get you gone, but take with you the admonition that, if you wish to pass the time comfortably between this and your old age, you must forswear henroosts other than your own."

Poston knuckled his forehead and shuffled out.

"And now?" continued the officer, addressing himself again to Kate.

"Now I have but to thank you for yon guard you have given me."

Balfour shook his head. "These countrymen of yours—these countrymen of yours!" he complained. "I vow they'll be the death of me! 'Tis but three days past that the same company to which this rogue belongs—Dunlap's—was sent on a scouting expedition beyond Whitehall. Maclae, he who is detailed to your farm, was in their company. To afflict me for lack of zeal in his service, the Devil sent them to the plantation of Pickens."

"I know Colonel Pickens," interrupted Kate. " 'Tis said that he was born a man but baptized a Presbyterian."

"In which case, the d—d nonconformist suffereth a double curse—that of rebellion and that of Calvinism," continued Balfour. "However, Dunlap,

egged on by the knave Poston and unopposed by Maclae, disregarded my parole and did incontinently burn and destroy the dwelling and appurtenances of this so-called Colonel."

"Once, Colonel Pickens caused Poston to be whipped," mused Kate.

"'Tis no matter. No doubt the knave richly deserved a thrashing. But I had taken the rebel's parole and my pledge was violated. I should have shot Dunlap and cashiered Maclae—they were in command and are responsible for the wrong. Like as not I would have done so had they not had the cover of Cornwallis's order that rebels refusing to take up arms for the King should be harried."

"Patience under wrong is not notably characteristic of Colonel Pickens," observed Kate.

"'Tis said that he rageth, and God knows he hath cause. Dunlap is wilful—I sent Maclae a-purpose to restrain him."

"But surely the Lieutenant, being the inferior officer, was not responsible."

"He is a regular officer which Dunlap is not," replied Balfour testily. "He hath held a commission long enough to know that even a general's orders are to be obeyed with discretion. He knew of my parole to Pickens and should have withstood Dunlap.—Na'th'less," he added after a pause, "I shall soon be rid of the matter."

"How so?"

"I am recalled to Charles Town. Cruger will command here."

"Ye are leaving us? Why—I am sorry!"

"I thank ye. But ye will not suffer from the change —Cruger is most competent."

"I like Colonel Cruger well," agreed the girl. "If you are to go, 'tis our good fortune to have you thus ably succeeded. But the day wanes—I must go. I thank ye, sir, for your courtesies and wish ye kind entreatment in Charles Town."

She took her leave, and when she had reached the outskirts of the village she saw ahead of her Maclae and his squad, the Lieutenant having already mustered his detail and taken the road. For a time she followed them slowly, then she touched her horse with the spur and speedily overtook them.

"You are prompt sir," she remarked as she reined in beside the officer.

Maclae bowed. "One is always prompt in the performance of a pleasant errand," he averred.

"Pleasant?—But I had thought to crave your pardon for being the occasion of your assignment to a dull duty."

"Such were an unthrifty waste of words."

" 'Tis kind to say so much."

" 'Twill be kinder if you cease to fly my presence."

She flushed. "I must have seemed unmannerly," she conceded. "But look ye, sir, you held yourself

as so superior—so high and mighty—so self-satisfied, if I be permitted so much, in your fine, new uniform—"

He raised his hands in mock amazement. "I?" he protested, "I, who perish of ennui in these desolate woods? I, who ache with choked sighs, assume airs in the presence of divinity?"

"Hoity-toity!" she jibed, tossing her head. "I sh'd think a man—even a King's officer in a new uniform—might jib somewhat at halting divinity in a lane."

"Ah— But," he waved his hand airily, "you do not reckon your own desirability. Who, having divinity so near, would willingly see his goddess depart?"

"Ye mock me very prettily, sir, but I am partially a fool—"

"Nor do I esteem ye one. When I dubbed ye goddess, I meant Minerva, the goddess of wisdom."

"Ye're most unkind."

" 'Tis not so meant. I am well-intentioned and sometimes intelligent."

"I thank ye for the information. Touching the latter item, I should not have suspected it."

The young man laughed. "Let us cease this fooling," he suggested. "Mistress Kate, I do rate myself happy to be near you—to save you trouble—to protect you, if need be, albeit you are so well able to protect yourself." He lowered his voice to a confidential pitch—he spoke softly and in a tone cal-

culated to please a maiden's ear. "Shall we not be friends?"

The girl glanced at him archly. He appealed to her—she had not known many of his kind. Finally she extended her hand to him.

"My faith on't!" she pledged him briefly.

During this conversation the marching soldiers had drawn ahead, nor did the officer and the girl overtake the squad until the farmhouse was in sight. After reaching the gate, Kate called Cæsar forth, indicated the barn which the guard should occupy, delivered her horse to the negro, and disappeared within the house. Half an hour later Maclae, having given his orders and made his dispositions, went up the steps of the veranda, but if he had expected to meet his hostess there he was disappointed. As on a former occasion, he was greeted by the roar of old Anthony.

"Sukey!" the old man called. "Sukey!"

Maclae, expecting Amelie, breathed his relief. He remembered the sinister old woman with distaste and a creepiness of the flesh, and was well pleased that it was a younger and more ordinary wench who answered the call and conducted him to his chamber.

When his conductress had departed, the young man took stock of his surroundings. The room was rather bare but clean. Beside the bed in one corner his portmanteau awaited him, for the baggage mule had preceded the squad. On the opposite side of

the apartment there was a washstand which held a basin and ewer. The windows were shaded with muslin curtains and the floor was bare save for a small, homewoven rug. The place was by no means luxurious but Maclae was well content since his quarters in the village had been narrow and uncomfortable.

After occupying a few moments in putting his belongings to rights and in freeing himself from the dust of the march, the officer seated himself in an easy chair and lighted a Spanish cigarro. He was an American as truly as were those of Poston's class but he was a man of the town and as such he valued the amenities of life. Presently Cæsar, in the name of the master, brought in a glass of grog and with this at his elbow Maclae—alternately sipping and smoking—took his dreamy ease after his hot walk. He found his surroundings the more pleasing since not all of his life had been spent in barracks.

Indeed the young officer's grandfather had been a cadet of a prominent Scottish family. In pursuit of fortune this Maclae had emigrated to New York, had engaged there in commerce, and had prospered. The second American Maclae, the father of the Lieutenant, had followed his father's example and, somewhat late in life, had improved his fortunes by marrying an heiress of Dutch descent. The son of this union, the officer who now sipped his rum and water under Anthony Fowler's roof, had been educated in Edinburgh in preparation for a career at

the bar. In all differences between the colonies and the King, it had been the habit of the Maclaes to look at the matter from a European rather than an American standpoint.

Long before the final breach however, the second Maclae, while on a voyage to the West Indies, had died of yellow fever, leaving to his son and heir a comfortable fortune and a doting mother. The son, consequently had never known hardship nor even scarcity. Not lacking fundamentally Scottish shrewdness or Scottish pluck, he had suffered, nevertheless, from his environment. During his entire existence his path had been smoothed before him, his life had been guided and guarded, his decisions made for him in advance of the event. Therefore, in any time of stress, he was apt to drift with the tide; when he should have denied himself for the good of his soul, he was given to considering the ease of his flesh.

The dominating force in his existence had been, and was, his mother. She was a possessive woman—her son she regarded as a part of herself rather than an individual entity. She was, withal, a woman of energy and desired above all things that her son should succeed according to her standards of success. She expected him, consequently, to wed money and position and to settle down, as had his forbears, to a quiet lifetime of acquisition. To bring these expectations to fruition was the sole object of her existence. And had any one told her that she was selfish,

she would have denied the aspersion most bitterly.

Maclae loved his mother and had been accustomed from childhood to bend his wishes to accommodate hers. As he grew older, however, he began to feel that, being a woman, she was unable to understand the ways of a man, his needs or his desires. Then, his student days in Edinburgh having removed him from her supervision, he proceeded to allow himself a latitude in his conduct which he felt assured that she would not approve. Unwilling to quarrel with her, he had sought a refuge in secretiveness, fearing not her wrath but her pain and her disappointment in him. Finally, his college days ended, he had returned to New York and his former restrictions.

The breaking away of the colonies from the mother country and the consequent opportunity for service in the British army had appeared to him, at this juncture, as a most welcome means of enlargement—as a heaven-sent opportunity for casting off the maternal control which he now felt to be as intolerable as it was intangible. Fortunately for the success of his designs, his mother had by no means opposed his desire to serve—she was a conservative woman who reprobated rebellion in any of its aspects—but had willingly sought a commission for him. She saw to it that he was well placed; this being the more easily accomplished since Colonel Cruger of the King's forces was a kinsman of her own.

Consequently, in time, young Hugh Maclae had

been sent with his regiment to Charles Town, had participated in the siege of that city in a manner not unbecoming his years and rank, and had at last been posted at Ninety Six.

He was not thinking of all this as he sat in his bedchamber at Anthony Fowler's and sipped temperately at his grog. He was thinking of pretty Kate, of old Anthony, and of Amelie. What a queerly assorted household it was!

Kate now! How she stimulated one! She was like to be a veritable godsend in this wilderness where everything else that lent a zest to existence seemed to be lacking. As he thought of her, his brain teemed with pleasing speculations. He lifted his glass and smiled in anticipation of their future meetings.

"Here's to Mistress Kate Fowler!" he said aloud, and drank.

It was some hours later when Maclae, newly returned to his room from posting a sentry and a further inspection of his little command, heard a discreet tap at his door. It was now grown dark and his evening meal, served by Sukey in his chamber, had already been dispatched. Opening, he found Kate waiting without.

"I trust that ye found your supper to your liking and Sukey sufficiently attentive," she began with stately courtesy.

"The food was comforting," he replied with equal gravity, "and the servant that which a servant should

be. But 'tis said that it is not good for man to be alone and I do something resent that I am debarred your company at table."

She swept him a mocking curtsey. "Neither would you have supped apart," she laughed, "had I not deemed that so fine a gentleman might prefer his own company to that of a rustic."

He lifted his hands in affected horror. "You—a rustic?" he protested. "Could I entertain such heresy when your slightest gesture doth stir my pulses?"

She laughed again lightly. "In that ye are apt of tongue, though insincere of heart, ye are adjudged to penance," she answered. "Hereafter you will take your meals at the common table."

"Can that be common which beauty adorns?"

"I cry you mercy. I am not so inured to compliments as are your accustomed ladies and so find your fine speeches somewhat smothering in their abundance. Besides in all this trifling I forget my errand. My father, seeing that he can not come to you, begs the favor of your company for a space."

He bowed. "I am honored," he declared, "and will wait upon him immediately."

The candles were already lighted in the room of the invalid and the wine set forth when Kate ushered Maclae into it.

"I give you welcome, Mr. Maclae," boomed the deep voice from the bed. "Be seated at your pleasure, sir, and do not spare the wine should you fancy

it. 'Tis an authentic vintage, as who should know better than myself, since I fetched it into the country in my own vessel."

"You have voyaged then?" queried the young man politely as he filled his glass.

"Now and again," assented Anthony, "but mostly among the islands to the south'ard."

"Say you so," commented the Lieutenant. "My father also, once or twice, made passage thither. Indeed he died on one of the islands of the Spanish seas—of a fever."

"And I, more than once, have come nigh a-perishing there," observed Anthony, "but not of a fever. Howbeit I did not beg your presence that I might burden you with tales of old sailings; 'twas rather that you might tell me of the doings to the north-'ard since you are but some months come from thither. What fortunes have the King's arms in that direction?"

"There as here," answered the soldier confidently, "the King's arms are in the ascendant. Here, as ye can perceive, the cause of the Congress is irretrievably lost; there, though lacking in such immediate decision, the affairs of the rebels slowly molder into ruin. Indeed the tale of His Majesty's successes groweth so long that I am at a loss where to begin."

"Ye might begin with Burgoyne at Saratoga," suggested Anthony maliciously.

"But that happened nigh three years ago," pro-

tested Maclae. "The enterprise was a sound one, but somebody blundered and Sir Henry Clinton moved too late to Burgoyne's assistance. 'Twas a misadventure, I grant ye."

" 'Twas more than a misadventure; 'twas a disaster. It brought in France to the aid of the Congress and the threat of France forced the evacuation of Philadelphia. Following that, Washington struck ye a shrewd blow at Monmouth in Jersey."

Maclae flushed hotly. "I was there—'twas none so bad," he asserted. "Toward the end of the day our troops became something disorganized and we resumed our march."

"Ye have been in battle—ye fought at Monmouth?" inquired Kate with sudden interest.

"I saw some small service in the rearguard and caught a scratch in the shoulder," explained Maclae modestly.

"If I mistake not, 'twas that rearguard action that saved Clinton," averred Anthony. "Ye were, in fact, withdrawing into New York when Washington beset ye, were ye not?"

"Sir Henry was concentrating his strength into New York—yes."

"And since, your troops have remained there—outgeneralled and idle?"

"Neither outgeneralled nor idle, if it please you sir. Sir Henry Clinton hath merely shifted his operations to the southern colonies whence Washing-

ton and the Congress were drawing unlimited supplies. 'Twas less than six months after Monmouth that Savannah was taken."

"Aye, and your occupation of that town hath opened a road through which the riffraff and cattle-stealers of British Florida have sorely harassed us."

"That may be so, but now that the King's officers are here, you will find that they well know how to deal with such gentry."

" 'Twas from Savannah, last year, that Prevost ravaged the coast country and knocked at the gates of Charles Town," interpolated Kate. "Had the British General possessed a little more resolution—"

"Had Lincoln possessed other than a small wit," broke in Anthony, "Prevost, belike, would have found himself entrapped. As it was the New Englander allowed his adversary to escape into Savannah, then with the aid of the French, assaulted him there, and came away soundly beaten."

"Even so, sir," agreed Maclae. "And the failure of Lincoln to retake Savannah was the beginning of the end. Sir Henry Clinton, sailing from New York, besieged Lincoln in Charles Town and after three months took the city and the whole of Lincoln's army."

"He should have taken both the city and the army within three weeks—from Lincoln," grumbled Anthony sourly.

"Were ye under fire before Charles Town as well as at Monmouth?" asked Kate.

"For some days," replied the Lieutenant, "the fusillade on my position was so considerable that a hat raised on a ramrod above the earthwork would be immediately riddled with bullets."

"I like not this land fighting," ejaculated Anthony, "—this grubbing and burrowing—this marching and countermarching. Give me a sound deck and the open sea, and a score of stout fellows apt with either cutlass or carronade." In his excitement he rose halfway up from his pillow while, momentarily, his eyes flashed and his wasted cheek flushed.

Maclae looked at him with added interest. "You feel so, sir," he said, "since, aforetimes, you have been a sailor."

"Aye," answered the other, sinking back with a gesture of resignation, "have been!"

CHAPTER IV

A WEEK had passed during which the men of Maclae's detachment had grown fat with good living and idleness. Maclae, for his own part, was well content; he had foreseen that he would be. It is true that the goblin-featured Amelie favored him from time with malevolent glances, and that old Anthony, although always courteous, could scarcely be accounted cordial. But to Maclae, a young man nursing in his imagination the counterfeits of desired caresses, the attitude of these superannuated individuals was of no importance—it was only the girl who counted.

His acquaintance with Kate had grown apace—it could scarcely have been otherwise. The exigencies of military service had, for some months, debarred a young man, in whom indulgence was sweet to the flesh, from any contact with attractive femininity. The environment of a thoroughly normal young woman had, up to this time, afforded her no desirable human material from which to choose a mate. Under the circumstances, it was inevitable that the two should, sooner or later, indulge in love passages.

If Anthony Fowler suspected the growing intimacy between the two, he made no sign. But it was quite clear to Maclae that Amelie not only suspected

an affair of the heart but disapproved of it. He found it difficult even to speak to the girl save under the eyes of this unwholesome-looking duenna—this negress with a face like an imprecation who confined herself to an omnipresence which he could not resent.

Up to this time, however, Kate had been unaware of the depth of her own regard for the young Lieutenant. She found him handsome, courteous, and amusing. She would have been less than feminine—no true daughter of Eve—had she been able to refrain from experimenting with the apple of temptation. Consequently, aware of the charm which she had cast upon him, she held herself just beyond his grasp, approaching when he was quiescent and withdrawing herself skilfully whenever he essayed to draw near. This is a dangerous game; it breeds in the man all the excitement of pursuit, it offers to the woman the subtle flattery involved in being pursued.

Today it seemed entirely possible that their diverting pastime must come to a definite end. One Kerr, a middle-aged Captain, had arrived with orders to take over the outpost at Fowler's. Why Maclae had been thus summarily displaced, no one knew —the orders were explicit but by no means revealing. Kerr was to take command at Fowler's and Maclae was to report to Cruger at Ninety Six. To be sure the distance between the farm and the town was not great, but it was an open question how long Maclae would be permitted to remain in the town.

The folly of the British commanders was bearing its fruit. Here and there, the backwoodsmen were gathering in revolt and Cornwallis was organizing expeditions to crush all such.

Cruger's orders having been duly transmitted, Maclae and Kerr repaired to old Anthony's chamber to acquaint the invalid with the altered arrangement. Afterward, while Kerr and the old man gossipped concerning the late defeat of Captain Huck of the Royalists by a party of Thomas Sumter's men —a disaster to the British arms as surprising as it was complete—Maclae withdrew under the pretence of arranging his baggage. Nevertheless he ignored his portmanteau and sought out Kate whom he found, for once, dispensing with the company of the negress.

"Mistress Kate," he asked as he came into her presence, "can ye not perceive the map of misery upon my face?"

Intelligence of the impending change had already reached her, and she was beginning to realize that with the departure of this young man something that was beginning to savor sweetly in her life would also be removed. None the less, as she lifted her eyes to his face, she smiled quizzically.

"I do envisage something of distress," she answered lightly. "Think ye that 'tis caused by original sin or some later disease?"

"No doubt I have antagonized the gods by too much prayer—I am ordered to leave ye."

"I have heard as much," she answered more soberly. "But, since it is lonely here, it is possible that you rejoice in your removal."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips. "I go unwillingly," he murmured. "I would that ye knew how unwillingly, Mistress Kate! But a soldier, in the face of his orders, hath no more will than the hands on the face of a clock."

Her eyes fell and she fidgeted with the corner of her apron. "We shall miss ye," she remarked simply.

"You will miss me, Mistress Kate?"

"Yes," she admitted slowly, "yes." Then with a sudden assumption of carelessness. "Why not?"

"I had scarcely hoped so much," he breathed.

She lifted her head. "I have been lonely—I will be lonelier, then."

He possessed himself of her hand and she suffered him. He stooped and their lips touched. "The town is not so far away," he suggested. "Perhaps—"

"Yes, perhaps—?"

"You might come there, or I here."

"Perhaps." She could not forbear to tease him a little.

"Will you come?"

"I am often in the town—on business," she answered demurely.

"And you will come there to see me sometimes, Kate?"

"Perhaps."

"Or I could ride out and meet you—somewhere by the roadside?"

"I can not prevent ye from loitering by the wayside."

"But would ye wish me to wait for you there?"

"Perhaps. But if it fell out that I liked not your company, I could—" she smiled at him archly.

"I admit that you could. But ye will not, Kate? Say that ye will not!"

"Perhaps—not." She was again making play with the corner of her apron.

"Wednesday is your day for coming in, is't not? Next Wednesday? At about three of the clock?"

"Sometimes Wednesday—early in the afternoon."

"I shall be waiting at the great oak on the hill top. Ye will not disappoint me, Kate? Ye will not cripple my hope?"

"Ye would not be disappointed if I came not."

"Aye, but I would be! Bitterly!"

"Disappointments teach patience."

" 'Twould only breed perseverance in me."

" 'Twill be useless to disappoint ye then?"

"Quite. I'd seek ye till I found ye!"

"Ye are so good at masquerading, that you deceive yourself."

"I am no masquerader—I dream of you!"

"Then—maybe—"

"Aye, surely! Kate, thou'rt divine!" He slipped an arm about her and their lips met a second time.

"Good-bye!" she whispered.

They parted. Something new, strange, terrifying yet delightful, seemed suddenly injected into her hitherto unperturbed existence. As Maclae mounted the horse that was waiting for him, she watched him. When he passed out of the enclosure into the road, an unaccustomed fear clutched at her. It was wartime—a rifleman hidden in the woods yonder—a whiplike report—an empty saddle— Perhaps she had found ecstasy only to lose it. She turned back into the house in a tremor of apprehension.

Meantime, Kerr had the Madeira at his elbow and he and Anthony were hobnobbing. Kerr was a bluff, goodnatured fellow who perceived very clearly that Cornwallis's severity was defeating rather than promoting the British purposes.

"Sumter is returned and hath taken post on the Catawba," the Captain said to Anthony. "Rutledge is, I hear, in Philadelphia petitioning the Congress for aid. Worse, all the North Carolina backwoodsmen are mustering to resist us, having had tidings of our ill-conceived policies here, while the woods about us are filled with malcontents and outliers who have fled their homes and firesides rather than be forced into our service. These need but leaders and rallying points—"

"Pickens will presently furnish both so far as this section is concerned," predicted Anthony from his bed.

"Pickens? Why Pickens hath surrendered and taken his parole. Did ye not know?"

"Aye, I know; but have ye respected his parole? 'Twas told me—"

Kerr made a gesture of annoyance. "That rogue Dunlap!" he ejaculated. "He and some of those under him nurse, it seems, some ancient grievances against the Colonel. Maclae and Dunlap were sent out to apprehend such malcontents as are refusing their proper service. Instead, Maclae being young and lacking the bowels to withstand Dunlap, the party burned Pickens's buildings. 'Twas most regrettable!"

"A poor parole it is," commented Anthony, "that doth not protect its holder. 'Tis a contract that on the one side ye have broken. I misdoubt if Presbyterian Andy, for all his probity, will account himself holden by such a dishonored paper. That the man is a gentleman and religious, I grant ye: but his religion savoreth of the Mosaic law—he is like to exact of ye an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

"I am acquainted with Colonel Pickens and I esteem him," broke in Kerr. "As his friend, I trust—"

"Pickens is a true son of the kirk," continued Anthony. "I know that Scotch-Irish breed and somewhat mislike them; but they'll fight ye readily enough. Dour they are, and hard, and unforgiving

—ill cattle to force and uncommon handy with the rifle; albeit I hold the rifle to be a cowardly weapon that takes its toll from afar and is not frank in combat as is the cutlass or the pistol."

"As I have said, I like Pickens," reiterated Kerr. "I regard him as a just man and honest. 'Tis a pity that he and I cannot see eye to eye in this matter of the colonies."

"I have no quarrel with the Elder," admitted the other without enthusiasm. "He goeth his way and I go mine. We have not clashed."

It was perhaps an hour later that a tall, spare man in a faded blue uniform rode up to the farmhouse gate. He had tethered his nag to a pendent branch—a "swinging limb"—of one of the willowy wateroaks and was advancing toward the veranda before Anthony, from the vantage point of his window, became aware that a visitor was at hand. Instantly, however, with perception, he roared a hospitable order.

"Cæsar! Dewberry! Step lively! Take the horse of Colonel Pickens and show the gentleman into my room!"

Before the newcomer had reached the steps, the negroes appeared. "Tek um pony een de barn?" inquired Cæsar with deference.

Pickens shook his head. "No, leave him as he is. Mayhap I shall hasten my departure.—Tell me; is Captain Kerr within?"

"Enty?"

"The British Captain—Kerr. I am told that he is posted here. Is he, perchance, within?"

The invalid overheard the colloquy and interrupted. "Come inside, Colonel," he invited. "'Tis so ordered that I may not come out to you.—The man ye seek lodgeth here; I'll have him summoned."

Pickens, preceded by Dewberry, entered the house and was ushered into Anthony's bedchamber.

"I hope I find you better, Anthony," he remarked.

"Mine is not a hurt that can be cured by a poultice," returned the other.

At this moment Captain Kerr came in. "Colonel Pickens, I am overjoyed to see you!" he exclaimed striding forward and offering his hand.

"Captain Kerr—your servant!" returned Pickens tendering his own hand.

"Amelie!" bellowed Fowler. "Glasses and a fresh bottle! Step lively, wench."

Instead of Amelie, it was Kate who brought in the wine. She spoke to Pickens, after which she served them and seated herself in their company.

"We are honored by your presence, sir," she said to the Colonel.

"Were I twenty years younger, my visits might be more frequent," returned Pickens gallantly. "Age having somewhat overtaken me, it happens that today I came expressly to see Captain Kerr."

Kerr bowed in acknowledgment.

"Across the hall there is a chamber in which ye may find privacy," suggested the girl.

"There is no need of concealment," replied Pickens, "although I could wish that my errand had been a happier one."

There was a decided contrast in the appearance of the three men. Kerr was a typical Saxon, heavily built, ruddy, sandy haired; Pickens was more Keltic, darker, taller, more ascetic, and more imaginative. Anthony appeared more exotic than either, although his type had been common in the Charles Town of forty years before. Where Kerr's features were rounded and those of Pickens elongated, Anthony's seemed to approach the outline of a square. It required but a glance to perceive that, in his nature, he was the least scrupulous and most daring man of the three.

At the last remark of Pickens, a look of surprise appeared momentarily on the features of the Captain.

"An unhappy errand? To me?" he inquired.

"Yes, Captain Kerr. I reckon you my friend in counsel though my opponent in the field. To hold your good opinion seems important to me, therefore I am come to explain to you that which otherwise might be adjudged to my discredit. You know what I have suffered—flesh and blood cannot bear the indignity! I am here to request that you inform my Lord Cornwallis that I no longer consider myself bound by his parole."

"Colonel Pickens!" Kerr started to his feet in genuine concern.

"Softly, sir, softly!" continued Pickens, waving his interlocutor back into his seat. "You would tell me, my friend, that by disregarding this parole I place my neck within the loop of a halter. I know it, sir, and I assume the hazard. I kept my word; my Lord Cornwallis broke his. I have considered all, and though I fight in the shadow of a gallows 'twill not be the first time that I have incurred peril."

"Egad, Pickens, I approve ye!" exclaimed Anthony. "Although it cannot be said that heretofore we have been cronies."

"But your word, Colonel? Your honor?" expostulated Kerr.

Pickens folded his arms. "Let no man asperse either," he returned with dignity. "Where was the pledge and the honor of Cornwallis when my house and barns went up in flames?"

Kerr shook his head in deprecation. "Ah! That!" he rejoined. "It was a most damnable error. Dunlap and Maclae should have— But think you, Colonel Pickens, ought Lord Cornwallis himself be held accountable for this indiscretion in two mere subordinates?"

"Hath my Lord punished Dunlap, his subordinate?" demanded Pickens. "Or Maclae, his pretty little gentleman from the North? I say to you, Captain Kerr, that my wrongs cry to heaven and that I myself will right them. And if I risk the halter, mark you, so doth Dunlap and the young man Maclae.

By the Eternal, in my eyes each is as doomed as Agag and if either should fall into my hands I'll hang him as high as Haman!"

"Man, ye are beside yourself," remonstrated Kerr. "Take thought. Do not commit yourself to this suicidal course!"

Pickens rose. "I have taken thought," he announced with recovered calmness. "I am resolved."

Kerr knitted a troubled brow. "Colonel Pickens, you are my friend," he said slowly. "As a friend, I am loyal to ye. But my duty? It may be that I ought to give ye into custody, here and now, as an enemy to the King."

"No!" roared Anthony inserting his hand beneath the counterpane. "I've naught to do with your quarrel but you're on my quarterdeck. Don't forget that. Colonel Pickens, ye have my safe-conduct."

Kerr glanced at the old man with some compassion. How pitiful, thought he, to threaten so stoutly and be so incapable of enforcing the matter. But Kate had risen in real alarm—she alone knew her father and understood that it was no idle threat which had fallen from his lips.

Pickens, however, did appreciate the intention. "I thank ye, Anthony," he said. "If I have not always approved of ye, still I wish ye well and sympathize with ye in your affliction."

"My affliction—" grumbled the old man. "'Tis true that the devil hath his grip on me, but I have not yet begged quarter of him—nor shall!"

During this interchange between Pickens and Anthony, Kerr had been moving about uneasily and irresolutely. He did not regard the invalid seriously, but he wished to persuade Pickens—not to clash with him. Finally he spoke.

"I have considered this matter," he announced. "I take the conversation between Colonel Pickens and myself as the confidential intercourse usual between intimates. I shall respect this confidence so long as Colonel Pickens proceeds to no overt act against His Majesty."

Pickens bowed. "I pray you act as it seemeth your duty, Captain," he counselled.

"I am so acting," declared Kerr. "But let me persuade you—"

"Nay, do not reopen the question—my decision is taken! Again, I thank you, Anthony. Your servant, Mistress Kate. Kerr, in some happier hour—"

"Stop, Colonel— One last appeal—"

" 'Twould not avail. Advise Dunlap and Maclae that, if I take them, I shall hang them. 'Tis not in me to send an unwarned man into the presence of his Maker."

Kate turned to the speaker. Her eyes were dilated, her whole body had stiffened with apprehension.

"Colonel Pickens, you do but jest," she hazarded. "You would not hang—?"

The stern Colonel compressed his lips. "The two I have mentioned are beyond my forgiveness," he

reiterated sternly. "Let them look to themselves!" With this speech he bowed again to the company and withdrew. A moment later, he was riding away.

"He doth not swear," commented Anthony, "therefore his oaths curdle within him and beget intolerance."

CHAPTER V

ALTHOUGH the policies of Cornwallis had roused many of the men in the upper country to resistance and although Rutledge had obtained from the Continental Congress a definite promise that a new American army would be sent southward, the military situation in South Carolina was still highly favorable to the British arms. Colonel Patrick Ferguson, who had been recruiting for the King in the Ninety Six neighborhood, had enrolled nearly four thousand men in his loyalist militia, of whom perhaps fifteen hundred were immediately available; and Colonel Banastre Tarleton, Major Wemyss, and Major McArthur were overrunning the eastern and northeastern sections of the province. Against such formidable opposition, the little isolated groups of American backwoodsmen who had taken the field could offer no real resistance. Such successes as they achieved were in the nature of swift raids upon isolated loyalist detachments and were undertaken, as often as not, because of the sheer necessity of procuring food and ammunition.

Under the circumstances, Kerr was justified in believing that the decision of Pickens to break his parole was hazardous to the point of desperation.

But since his abrupt departure from Fowler's farm, no word had been heard from the partisan Colonel. It was Kerr's hope that time and sober reflection would lessen the resentment of his friend.

In the meantime Maclae, to his intense satisfaction, had found that his orders removed him, for the present, no further from Kate than the town of Ninety Six. On the Wednesday following his supersession at the advanced post, he had met the girl as he had planned. Thenceforward his wooing had proceeded normally and without notable incident. Sometimes he encountered her in the town; more often, as on the first occasion, they appointed a tryst at some spot on the lonely road; occasionally he came to the dwelling.

His visits to the house, however, were usually unsatisfactory. Kerr was there, and old Anthony, and Amelie. He much preferred to see Kate alone.

Still, on a bright Sabbath morning in the early days of August, he saddled his horse and, lacking urgent employment at the post, rode in the direction of the Island Ford. He had covered less than a mile when he noticed that a footman was preceding him in the same direction. This man bore all the marks of a native of the region. He walked like an Indian, striking the ground with his toes rather than with his heels, and from his hand there trailed a long rifle. On his head there was a coonskin cap and his jacket and nether garments were of coarse home-

spun. Because of the neighborhood of the post, Maclae feared no enemy; moreover there was something in the slouching gait of the fellow that appeared familiar. Presently the officer spurred forward.

On overtaking the man, he promptly recognized him to be Poston. Checking his horse, he accosted the irregular.

"Whither bound and on what errand?" he demanded.

The tory spat, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and laughed amusedly. " 'Twould hardly be fair, now," he suggested with a sly glance at the horseman, "to ax you that same question."

Maclae's face showed a tinge of self-consciousness and some annoyance. It was difficult, he found, to accustom one's self to the free and easy manners of the country militia.

"When, my good fool," he inquired, "was it made your duty to question me?"

The countryman ignored both the question and the epithet. Instead of replying, he began to sing, out-of-tune, a bawdy ballad of scandalous import.

Maclae's cheeks flushed a deeper red. "You ignore your officer, sirrah?" he demanded.

Poston removed his cap and scratched his head. "Look ye, Leftenant," he explained. "I am a man of no schooling. I have, no doubt, the wit of a jackass and the manners of a mule—the difference between me and a King's officer being, apparently, a

matter of parchment and sealing-wax. 'Tis not that I deny ye the right to question, but that 'twould be indiscreet for me to answer. In short, I am sent out confidentially by Colonel Cruger in pursuit of intelligence, and have been bidden to exercise my eyes and hold my tongue."

The officer smiled in spite of himself. "See that your errand doth not lead you into Mistress Fowler's hen-yard," he advised maliciously.

"Albeit my honesty owe nothing to inexperience," retorted the tory, "the Devil shall not, on this trip, prevail over me in regard to Mistress Kate. Can you promise so much?"

"Again you grow impudent, sirrah!"

"Nay, take it not so. I see what I see, but my business hath naught to do with your dealings with wenches. I go to the woods in His Majesty's interest, and I must see to't that the outlyers esteem me one of themselves. It ought to be easy—I once was regimented, at Stono, with some on 'em. Na'th'less, since Charles Town was taken, I've been l'yal."

"Say you so? And of late you scout for Cruger?"

"Aye, and see strange sights. Nigh a month agone, I met Colonel Pickens a'ridin' hell-for-leather away from yon outpost at Fowler's. He stopped me, and for a minute I thought him minded to pistol me. Ye see, he recalleth that you and I were with Dunlap and aided in destroying the buildings."

"I hear that he threateneth me," returned Maclae carelessly. "He should have a care of his own

neck. Let him but take up arms against the least of His Majesty's folk—"

"Aye, but catching comes before hanging. I did tell Pickens that too."

"It pleaseth him to wear his hurt as if it were a decoration. Do you know aught else of him?"

"No—he, with a few hangers-on, hath removed himself to the Injun land—the foot-hills whence he drove the Cherokees a few years ago."

"Is there fresh news of the malcontents?"

"They bestir themselves. Last week I were in Williams's country across the Saludy. Williams, being pressed by Ferguson, hath transferred all his movables beyond Charlotte and hath joined Sumter. Ferguson doth what he can, but every now and then Sumter's men surprise an outpost of our'n or gut a waggin train."

"We're quiet enough here."

"Yes—the last of our out-and-out whigs left with McCall. There were not above twenty of 'em. McCall j'ined Clarke and he, apparently, is also a-j'inin' Sumter. Clarke hath a large company—mostly Georgians."

"Ferguson should have intercepted Clarke. The Georgians must have marched squarely across his front."

" 'Twas not so easy. These parties when they shift camp offer nothing much to strike at. They filter through the woods in two's and three's and come together again at a given p'int."

"'Tis most annoying but not serious. Such fellows are mere banditti."

"Thar is worse news from the north'ard. I had it fresh from a rogue who desarted from Sumter. Saratogy Gates is a-marchin' south hotfoot with fourteen hundred Continentals at his back. He aims to collect the melishy as he comes and then to 'burgoyne' us."

"This is news indeed. Is it to be relied on?"

"The rapscallion who telled it me had talked with Gates's own messenger. 'Tis no secret that De Kalb is at Hillsboro with the Maryland line."

"Hath Colonel Cruger intelligence of all this?"

"Yea, he knows, and hath sent a dispatch to Cornwallis; albeit there is no doubt that His Lordship hath received more direct information. Indeed there is a rumor abroad that Cornwallis is already marching from Charles Town to Camden. Whether this be true or not, I am certain that Gates is afoot and means to give us a blast."

"'Tis a vastly interesting story that you tell. I had not thought ye to be so enterprising. Egad ye're valuable—something too free with your tongue perhaps, but—"

"Should I announce myself a son of Solomon, my mother would give me the lie," observed Poston with a wink.

"Still, ye are out of the camp and my duty is plain. Ye hold Cruger's pass, no doubt."

"Nay; a pass would be something dangerous in

the parts where I travel. A pass is evidence ye see and might be the occasion of my passing."

"But you should hold the necessary papers. Even had I not overtaken ye, Kerr holds the post at Fowler's and if ye show no pass—"

The countryman chuckled. "Leftenant," he confided, "I could take a hunnerd men into the town yon and your advanced posts be none the wiser. Ye guard the roads, but I know a better way out than by any road. I have my privy ways, you see— And now, 'tis something abrupt, but—Good day t' ye, sir!"

At the point they had reached, the road was bordered by woods and thickets; and, as he uttered his farewell, Poston suddenly leaped aside and placed the trunk of a tree between himself and the officer.

"Halt there, ye rogue!" challenged Maclae, but the only answer was a progressive tremor in the wayside chinquapin bushes.

Maclae swore with unction and fervency. As a line officer in a crack regiment, the niceties of military procedure had been duly impressed upon him, and it angered him to see any regulation flouted. But behind his momentary annoyance, there was a question of graver import which he presently perceived. There was no essential difference between this man Poston and those who composed the rebel bands. Who could fight an enemy who disappeared thus; who would not stay to fight; who struck and vanished leaving those assailed no choice but to re-

venge themselves upon the empty air? He felt gratified that Gates was coming—the man of Saratoga had been a British officer, therefore he could be depended on to adhere to the rules and to stage an open and spectacular battle.

He rode on, conning his thoughts moodily. He had hoped without reason, for he knew that she seldom went abroad on Sundays, to meet Kate at some point along the highway. He tried to reason with himself. The girl was becoming a veritable obsession and he was well aware that to wed her in the face of his mother's opposition required more resolution than he was likely to be able to summon. And that his mother would object to a backwoods daughter-in-law, he also knew—before his departure from New York, he had partially fathomed the maternal plans and had felt no objection to them.

But now he thought only of Kate and the more he reasoned the hotter became his inclination. Yet she was no fair, free lady, apt to yield lightly to the urge of the flesh. Pressed by the keenness of his desire, he pushed his mount into a gallop and did not slacken rein until he had reached Anthony Fowler's gate.

Having heard the clatter of hoofs from afar, Kerr met the young man at the gate of the yard. "Belike ye bring dispatches," he hazarded.

Maclae reddened. "No; all's quiet," he replied, trying to hide his confusion.

Kerr smiled broadly. "Your pardon!" he begged.

"I, too, in my youth, have hurried a good horse when there was beauty at the end of the ride."

"I—I needed the exercise," haltingly explained the younger man.

"To be sure ye did—as I did," agreed the other. "Come ye within. The Madeira is set forth, and even sour Anthony hath twice laughed outright. The beauteous Kate—"

"Yes, yes? What of Kate?"

"Curb your impatience—her beauty hath not staled. At the moment she is in the barnyard feeding her poultry."

"Poultry, eh? What a dolt I am to forget my errand! Mistress Cruger hath need of a pair of ducks. I must bargain for them. Will you excuse me until—" Without completing the sentence, he took three steps and disappeared around the corner of the building.

"Do not go away until ye have seen me and given me the news," called Kerr after him.

"Assuredly not. In just a moment—"

Kerr reëntered the veranda smiling his amusement. "Ducks!" he ruminated. "Mistress Cruger hath need of ducks! Doth the lad esteem me a simpleton unable to perceive that the cockerel hath need of a pullet!"

Maclae made his way toward the barnyard. He had eyes only for Kate whom he could now perceive standing in the midst of her fluttering, cackling, quacking flock. He approached her unobserved.

"La, how you startled me!" she exclaimed, as he reached her side and raised her hand to his lips.

"I could not help coming," he assured her. "My dreams of beauty are but thoughts of you. It has been so long—"

" 'Twas but three days ago that I met ye," she chided.

"Still it occurred to me that ye might pity me and therefore come—"

"Not on Sunday, surely! What would not the gossips be saying?"

"Let them say what they will—I am past all caution. D'ye know that I cannot live without ye, my sweet Kate?"

"D'ye ever suspect that it may also be difficult to live with me?" she inquired archly.

" 'Twould be heaven, methinks," he asseverated.

"Wait until you have tried it, sir."

"When shall we try it, my bonny?" he inquired. "Nightly, in some close corner of my brain, we do embrace and kiss."

"Perhaps 'twere best to be content with that," she suggested teasingly.

"But ye do love me, Kate? Ye will make me happy?"

She placed her hand on his arm. "Truly, I love ye," she answered more soberly. Then she laughed. "Amelie saith," she went on in a lighter tone, "that if I love ye, I do so to my own damnation. She saith that to soldier-men changed loves are of as

small consequence as changed sorts of meat. Amelie is old, you know, and hath the second-sight."

Maclae made a grimace. "'Tis time that hag were losing her first sight," he commented. "She hath been against me from the first. With you, I am in Heaven but when I see her I think that I have descended to hell and have found the Devil in."

The girl laughed. "Ye are quite unfair to the poor old wench," she protested. "She is but jealous of your regard for me—she reared me, you see. But, Hugh," suddenly there was the suspicion of a tremor in her voice, "say that she is wrong—say that I shall not be damned because of you!"

He smoothed her hands within his own. "Nay, why regard old Amelie's croaking?"

"But she is old, so old! She hath seen so much; she hath so much knowledge! Tell me, Hugh; having grown a heart, may I not get some use of it?"

"The crone hath no knowledge of the depth of my love. That heart is safe, if 'tis but in my keeping."

"And ye will not, as they say of soldiers, love and ride away?"

"When I ride away, dear Kate, you shall ride with me."

She lifted her head with a sudden accession of pride and decision. "An ye wanted me," she declared, "I'd ride with you, Hugh. Aye, an ye wanted me, I'd ride with you to the end of the world!"

Disregarding the fact that they were in the open

where all might see he caught her into his arms. "There spoke my gallant Kate," he applauded as he kissed her. "Once my duty here is done, we *will* ride forth together. God speed the good day when we may!"

For the moment, he was quite sincere. Her lips were on his; her full breasts were pressed against his bosom; for the possession of her he would have bartered his hope of Heaven—then and there.

Their emotion ebbed. Somewhat shamefacedly but with their hands still clasped, they turned and went toward the house.

"My father," said Kate in contrition, "I had forgotten him!"

"We will forget him no longer," replied Maclae lightly. "I recall that I promised to meet Kerr, who is with him, and impart my small store of news."

As they entered the house, they encountered Amelie who gave the young man a side-long, disapproving glance.

"Amelie," remarked Kate sharply, "the Lieutenant Maclae is my friend."

The negress edged away and raised her hands appealingly. "Ai! Ai!" she wailed.

The girl laid her hand on her lover's arm. "Don't hoot like an owl, Amelie!" she ejaculated reprovingly as the old woman shuffled away.

"The scaly she-devil!" commented Maclae as they passed on.

"Much of the savage remaineth in her," explained

Kate. "Hers is a long story. She hath knowledge which we whites cannot compass. The other negroes fear her."

They entered Anthony's chamber where Kerr still sat. The invalid glanced at them keenly but gave Maclae a civil welcome.

"Be seated, Lieutenant," he invited. "The bottle is on the table and Kate will serve ye with a glass. What news bring ye from the post?"

" 'Tis dull there. The ladies give little feasts and indulge in mild flirtations. Haldane, our engineer officer, is still busied erecting additional works although I cannot imagine an occasion for them. Yet it is rumored that Gates comes south with a new army and will soon try conclusions with Cornwallis."

"Gates?" inquired Kerr. "He of Saratoga?"

"The same. A pompous rascal, I am told."

"I judge the man overrated," observed Kerr sententiously.

"What of the countryside? What of Pickens?" questioned Anthony.

"In the immediate neighborhood of this post, near half the men are loyal or so profess. The remainder are fled or have become outlyers who skulk in the swamps. To the north'ard, up Charlotte way, the refugees are gathered into small bands which dodge hither and yon and plunder the loyal inhabitants—Pickens is sour-faced since the loss of his property and with a few followers seemeth to have withdrawn himself into the Indian country where he

sulks and is said to plot treason. So far, however, he hath not overtly breached his parole."

"God send he may never do so," interjected Kerr fervently. " 'Tis a hanging matter."

"Dunlap and yourself, Lieutenant, did the King ill service when ye burned Pickens out," remarked Anthony maliciously.

"We obeyed our orders as we construed them," returned Maclae stiffly. He was sensitive on this point, since Balfour had rated him so sharply about the affair.

"I hear he threatens to take the field in order to catch and hang the three of ye," continued Anthony.

"What three?"

"Dunlap, yourself and Poston—'tis said that he rateth you as villains in the order named."

"He may rate me as he chooses, but why thrust Poston, a private, into the company of his superiors?"

"Once Pickens flogged the knave for horsestealing. 'Tis reported that in revenge Poston guided Dunlap's company to Pickens's premises and urgently egged on the burning."

"He did render us service as a guide and mayhap showed some feeling in the matter of the burning. 'Tis of no importance—Pickens should thank our clement King that his life is spared."

Anthony laughed rumblingly. "Yon devout Elder careth little, I fancy, for the King or his clemency," he retorted. "But he hath a long memory

for an injury—I should give him sea-room were I in your shoes!"

"I shall not consider him at all," answered Maclae with an air of finality.

The wine was passed, and the questions and answers of general conversation continued to be tossed back and forth. For the most part, Kate was silent. Her happiness in her newly acquired lover was not unalloyed; at the bottom of the cup were the dregs of unrest and anxiety. The whigs were rising everywhere; old quarrels between individuals were being revived and intensified; forays and battles were occupying the minds of men, and in all these things the life of her lover was jeopardized. Already he had made a bitter enemy of Pickens and she knew, if Maclae did not, that the anger of the dour Colonel was no light thing.

Kerr also felt concerned about the young officer but not on the same account. He had, for a long time, been stationed in New York; and being well acquainted with Maclae's mother, was aware of the future which she had planned for this son of hers. In what light, he asked himself, would Mistress Rosina view this evident infatuation of Hugh's? Would this purse-conscious and class-conscious Dutch woman be willing to accept this backwoods maiden—albeit a magnificent creature with the hot fires of young life blazing high in her—as a daughter-in-law? The Captain glanced at the uncouth figure of the enigmatic Anthony and felt that she would not.

Because of his concern, when Maclae rose to leave, Kerr joined the young man and bore him company as far as the gate.

"How serious, Hugh," he asked, "is this affair with the young woman? As an older man let me warn ye, lad, that ye are advancing into dangerous ground."

"A soldier is ever advancing upon dangerous ground," replied the young man coldly. "I trust that I do not lack courage."

"Nay; I would that ye did. In such cases I should be less afeared for ye."

"What do ye fear?"

"Should ye marry her, ye'd break your mother's heart and ye know as much. You but consider the passing moment; she conneth the future."

"Who spoke of marriage?"

"Can ye think of anything else? Should ye trifle with her, yon bandit on the bed—or mayhap the girl herself, for she is not lacking in determination—will hunt you down and see that ye suffer for't."

Maclae forced a laugh, although his face was red with anger. "I thank ye, Captain Kerr," he said icily, "for your interest, but permit me to add that I seek no advice concerning my private affairs."

Kerr flushed. "You will pardon me, Lieutenant," he apologized formally. "Your affairs are, as you say, your own." He bowed and turned away.

Maclae swore softly to himself, mounted his horse,

and rode toward Ninety Six. At a turn in the highway, he halted and looked back. Kate was not in sight, but instead he perceived, in the distant doorway, the uncouth, menacing figure of old Amelie.

CHAPTER VI

EVEN before Sir Henry Clinton had taken Charles Town, the Continental Congress had taken cognizance of the serious danger that threatened the American cause in the South, and had sent to the aid of the Carolinas three battalions of Continentals, Armand's Light-horse, and three companies of artillery. It had been hoped that these troops might reach their destination in time to relieve the beleaguered city, but even if the roads had not been execrable and the means of transportation indifferent, their presence before the city could not have altered the result. Indeed, owing to the superiority of Sir Henry's well-organized expedition, their timely arrival on the scene might well have caused a regrettable addition to the magnitude of the disaster.

As it was, the detachment, headed by the gallant De Kalb, reached Hillsboro in North Carolina on June 20, 1780—more than a month after Charles Town had fallen. The surrender of the place having made General Lincoln a prisoner of war, the Congress now designated Gates, the victor of Saratoga, as Commander-in-Chief in the field of Southern operations.

In the North, the British and the American armies lay quiescent and watched each other. Having left

Cornwallis in command of the royal forces in the Carolinas, it was Clinton's plan to move South from New York to meet Cornwallis, who was expected, so soon as he had thoroughly subjugated the more southern colonies, to march northward through Virginia.

On July 25, Gates reached De Kalb's camp in North Carolina and assumed command. Soon afterward, having increased his strength by the addition of some considerable bodies of militia, he put his whole army in motion in the direction of Camden. It was a rumor of this movement that Poston had imparted to Maclae.

Heartened by the news that Gates was approaching with a Continental army, the harassed backwoodsmen, who had fled to the forests to escape enlistment in the British forces and who in consequence had been mercilessly hunted by their loyalist neighbors, had by the middle of August coalesced into considerable bodies. These bands, as well as the greater part of the loyalist militia, bore more resemblance to groups of roving Indians than to organized military commands. Often they chose their own leaders, at other times they accepted as commanders officers, commissioned by the Provincial Congress who, having fled the country at the surrender of Charles Town, were now returning to render Gates any aid that was possible. In all cases, these volunteers were subject to no terms of enlistment other than those dictated by their own wills or imposed by their personal necessi-

ties. They drew no pay, they received no rations, and they lived by plundering tory houses and British wagon trains. But nearly every man of them had an injury to avenge or a grudge to satisfy.

Of the many leaders of these partisans, three achieved a national prominence. These were Sumter, Marion, and Pickens. Sumter had been a lieutenant-colonel in the army raised by the Provincial Congress, but previous to the fall of Charles Town had resigned and retired to his farm. There he might have remained had not the British troopers under Tarleton burned his barns and harried him before them into North Carolina.

Marion, also a lieutenant-colonel in the Provincial regulars, had accidentally broken an ankle prior to the investment of the city by Sir Henry Clinton and had been invalided home. He, like Anthony Fowler, had spent at least a part of his youth in obscure enterprises in the West Indies. His military rank rendering him liable, after the British triumph, to be seized as a prisoner of war, he too had withdrawn into the more northern province.

Pickens, up to this time, had been no more than a captain of militia and a successful Indian fighter. He was a Calvinist of the type of John Knox—a type so unwilling to permit God to govern His own affairs that it is continually offering its assistance. Pickens read the Old Testament in preference to the New. He regarded hell as a place judiciously provided for the punishment of the enemies of the Elect.

He was a man of the utmost integrity and implacability.

At the time of this latest visit of Maclae to Fowler's farm, Sumter had returned to the borders of South Carolina. Here he had gathered about him quite a number of discontented whigs and, having inaugurated some minor operations against the British and tories, had already achieved several considerable successes.

Marion, on the other hand, had applied to Gates for employment, but Gates could see small promise in the ragged, sun-tanned little Carolinian and his handful of hunger-bitten followers. In order to rid himself of those whom he deemed incumbrances, the American general dispatched this well-trained and experienced officer on a fool's errand to the Peedee. There, however, Marion had at once assumed command of the whigs of the region and had begun to make headway against the tories who were overrunning that section.

But Pickens, as Poston had reported, had retired out of reach of the British power and in silence and retirement nursed his wrongs while he bided his time.

In spite of all this—although the military outlook from the British standpoint was not as favorable as Cornwallis could have wished—the obstacles to complete royal success were annoying rather than threatening. The flag of England dominated every important point and wherever the King's troops advanced in force, the Americans fled before them.

Into this unsettled situation, the Continental army under Gates had obtruded itself as it proceeded toward Camden. By forced marches Cornwallis moved from Charles Town to meet the invaders. At dawn, on the sixteenth day of August at Sander's Creek, the battle was joined. By afternoon Gates was in flight and the British were again the almost undisputed masters of South Carolina.

Nor was this all. Having thus summarily disposed of Gates, Cornwallis sent his dragoons under Tarleton in pursuit of Sumter. Tarleton overtook Sumter's command at Fishing Creek, surprised it, and practically annihilated it. It is true that Marion at Nelson's Ferry and Williams at Musgrove's Mill, achieved, a few days later, some small successes against the royal forces, but these were too inconsiderable to affect the issue in any large degree. Both Williams and Marion were promptly chased back into North Carolina.

In none of these events was Cruger's garrison at Ninety Six immediately concerned. Major Dunlap with a considerable party of mounted tories had, it is true, been sent to assist in Ferguson's advance, but otherwise the routine of this garrison was unaltered. Elsewhere—in Charles Town, at Camden, in Orangeburg and Georgetown—Cornwallis, exasperated by the delay in his plans caused by such an unexpected renewal of resistance, exercised the utmost severity against such whigs as he found in his power; but Cruger's post, remote from the recent

disturbances, had in a large measure escaped the blood and desolation characteristic of the resentment of the royal commander.

Maclae, being an officer in a regularly enlisted regiment, had not been called on to join the tory militia under Dunlap when the latter marched to join Ferguson. Ordinarily, since garrison life is usually dull, this would have irked him; but no subaltern has it in his power to decide where he shall go and when. His pleasure or displeasure in his assignments is seldom taken into account.

But at this time the young officer was quite content to be left behind. Other interests than Ferguson's march engaged his attention; he found it more pleasant to spend the hot August days in idle dalliance with Kate Fowler than to exhaust one's self in long marches through tangled thickets and over rugged hills. It seemed better to remain in the certain security of a fortified post, where one was free to make love and to kiss, than to die, without honor, the chance victim of some lurking, ragged rifleman. Indeed, it was well known that the backwoodsmen had already been admonished to "Mark the epaulet men."

It was not that the young New Yorker lacked physical courage. When his blood was up or the occasion demanded it, he could be reckless enough. But from his point of view, the contest in South Carolina was practically ended. He did not feel inclined to risk his life in performing the duties of an ordinary

policeman. Given an open field, a pitched battle, and a chance of distinction, he would have gone into action readily and even zestfully.

But he was a subaltern and therefore was not called upon to choose. Cruger's orders sent Dunlap to join Ferguson and Cruger's orders held Maclae at Ninety Six. If the routine of the garrison palled upon the young man, there remained to him the excitement of Kate.

Finally August passed and September came. One day, just after the mid-month, Kate rode into the town. With the coming of the autumn the partisans bands had renewed their activities, but these miniature triumphs and defeats were to Cornwallis matters of but passing concern. Ferguson was marching, practically unhindered, in the direction of the North Carolina mountains, although Dunlap had been wounded and as a consequence had been sent back to Ninety Six; no important British garrison was threatened; and the Commander-in-Chief of the royal army in the Carolinas was proceeding toward Charlotte, confident, since the defeat of Gates, that he might now begin that northward march to Baltimore which Sir Henry Clinton had planned.

Kate, at this period, felt carefree and happy. Owing to Cruger's protection, the farm had remained undisturbed; the season had been a productive one, and the time of the harvest approached. The market afforded by the nearby Ninety Six garrison assured her of the prompt disposal of her surplus; the open

communications between the post and Charles Town assured her of a ready channel through which to supply her necessities; and the money derived from the sale of her beef, mutton, and other produce almost equalled in amount the revenues from the farm in the long past days of peace.

In addition to all this, she enjoyed the company of Maclae. The man had stirred her imagination; and a sense of satisfaction—of completion—of a motive for existence—had stilled the recklessness once apparent in her. The future held a promise for her and, although there seemed reason in a swift consummation of love after a swift wooing, she was content to linger in a delicious anticipation of that pleasure which, for a time, seems to render the flash divine. She was, for the present, she told herself, tied by circumstances to the bedside of her afflicted father; furthermore, in the unsettled state of the times, Maclae might be transferred to a field whither she could not follow. Under the circumstances, she argued, a delay in the further definition of their relations seemed desirable. Thus she reasoned, but the time came when instinct proved stronger than reason. Dame Nature, though insistent in her demands, has small respect for the conventions.

Youth, however, is always intrepid—it has the courage of ignorance—so Kate rode, that day, with a song on her lips and with the echo of the song in her heart. As she entered the village, she perceived there only the usual aspects of stale indifference. She saw

lounging soldiers, citizens in shirtsleeves idling in the doors of their shops, people from the countryside hawking provisions or drinking in the tavern.

Disregarding all such commonplace inanities, she proceeded directly to Cruger's headquarters, where she spent an hour in balancing accounts with the commissary officer. She had concluded her business and was on the point of seeking her usual meeting with Maclae when the young officer in person burst into the room. He was followed by Poston—the tory seemed tired and travel-stained and lacked the impetuosity of his superior.

Seeing Kate, Maclae came at once to her side. "My dear girl!" he whispered. "I am desolated—positively ravaged, egad! Our meeting must be delayed. This man hath come in from the woods with intelligence of a high order. He must see Cruger—I dare not delay a moment. But wait ye here a little while. Perhaps I shall presently be released. In any case, I must see ye. Wait for me, sweetheart."

Kate retired to a chair and sat down as Cruger, who had been summoned, hastily entered the room. Maclae turned at once to his superior, saluted him, and spoke.

"Colonel Cruger, ye know this man Poston, I believe, and hath employed him aforetime. He hath just arrived from Augusta with a dispatch from Colonel Browne. Browne, he telleth me, is beleaguered by Clarke and requireth instant aid."

"What? Clarke?" exclaimed Cruger. "Why I

thought that Clarke had avoided Ferguson and had effected a junction with Sumter. What doth he in Georgia?"

"Clarke hath not been with the Game Cock since the affair at Musgrove's," explained Poston. "Ferguson hath been led by Williams, the miller, on a long goose-chase to'ards the mountains. Meanwhiles Clarke and McCall with a few followers slipped past him to the Long Canes and the Savannah. Thar they recruited among the discontented and the outlyers. Later they rannyvooed about four hunderd strong a few miles above Augusty. From thar they come down suddint on Browne's forts."

"And Browne's Indians—where were they to allow him surprised thus? His lousy crew of Creeks and Cherokees, for whom he hath drawn pay and rations and of whose skill in scouting and tracking he hath so often boasted to me?"

"Them?" Poston spat contemptuously. "Once ye fill an Injun's belly with grub and his skin with rum, he's wuthless. The lazy varmints were asleep in the shade on the river bank, and thar Clarke catched or killed the heft of 'em."

"But the forts? An Indian more or less— What of the forts?"

"Clarke moved so shrewdly that he had seized both the forts and the town afore Browne knew what was afoot. Na'th'less Browne got the most of his men out o' the mellay, and cast himself with them into the White House—the trading house—

north of the village. Clarke hath him hemmed in there. Browne hath no water supply and the dead horses and Injuns bestinketh the air until the place is sca'cely bearable."

Cruger had already torn open and read Browne's dispatch. "Stand by for a time," he said to the tory. Then he turned to Maclae. "Order the long roll beat, Lieutenant," he commanded, "and have the men mustered. Then instruct Mr. Whitby to make ready ten days rations for five hundred. Tell him there's no time to lose. We march at daybreak."

Turning to obey the order, Maclae beckoned to Kate and together they stepped outside. "Ye perceive, sweetheart," he said to her, "that we are in a pickle and like to be in a worse. Also that, pressed with sudden duties, I may not now await your pleasure as I had planned. 'Tis best that you return to the farm and await me there—I'll see ye ere I ride if I die for't."

"You will be of those that march then?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"And there is like to be fighting and I may lose ye, Hugh. I wish—I wish—"

"Nay, my dearest, do not make my duty hard for me. I am no poltroon, God wot. If Cruger fights I'll be at his elbow.—But I must leave ye now. Cruger is an impatient soldier and is much disturbed. Still before we set out, I'll see ye—surely, I'll see ye."

"Where, Hugh? How? When? Will ye come to me this evening, Hugh?"

"Yea, my sweet. But 'twill be late—very late. The post is already in a turmoil of preparation and Cruger doth rely on me to bring the confusion into order. Will ye receive me an I come to you deep in the night time, Kate?"

"Yea—at the window of my chamber—if such be a breach of propriety, I make no excuses for't."

"Why should ye not, an ye love me? Till then, Kate, till then!"

The sun was setting as the girl rode out of the town. She was greatly disturbed by this sudden turn of affairs. In her distress, she had conceded more than she realized but she did not think of that now. Whatever else might be involved, that which meant most to her was that on the morrow Maclae would be gone—perhaps to his death, almost certainly to some distant duty from which he might be long in returning. She was no coward—she would have marched with him, even would have died with him, in a certain fierce elation. But to sit inactive and wait, to see her happiness staked and, pending the issue, to hold her hands, seemed an infliction greater than she could bear. Her mind was in a tumult and her heart in rebellion.

The stars were winking in the sky and the whip-poorwills were beginning to call when she reached her own gate. Kerr and the soldiers of the guard were already gone—Cruger, in need of every available man, had hastily recalled them. Perfunctorily, but with a sense of something impending, she per-

formed her usual duties and then went to her own chamber to wait.

There, after a space, she put off her usual habit and from a queer-looking, iron-bound sea-chest, whose interior was perfumed with the stripped petals of jasmine blossoms, she withdrew and donned a loose robe of Delhi muslin.

"It may be the last time," she muttered, "and, if it be or not, he shall see me fair." Then she let down her hair.

Afterward she watched the stars, trying in this way to occupy her impatient mind, for she was tremulous with expectation. It was quiet and warm. From the nearby cowpens came the sighing of the well-fed and contented cattle as they lay down to rest. In the east, the Pleiades traced a bright pattern high above the tops of the trees; in the west, a lambent planet approached the dark horizon. To pass the time, she began mechanically to trace the constellations.

Soon, she found that she had forgotten the stars and was straining her ears for the sound of hoof-beats. Would he come? Could he come? It seemed to her that he might not, since the energetic Cruger would not spare him, and he himself, an energetic soldier, would in no wise neglect his military tasks. The evening wore on; the whippoorwills ceased to call, an owl hooted, a fox barked. She rose from her seat by the window and uneasily paced the floor.

At one in the morning, a pebble rattled lightly against the ledge of her window. Her breathing quickened, her heart leaped. She turned her face to the window.

"Kate?" The whisper was low but she heard it.

"In a moment," she breathed in reply. Swiftly she crossed the room on tiptoe, extinguished her guttering candle, and returned to the window.

" 'Tis you, Hugh?"

"Yea, 'tis I." His voice was thick with excitement.

She leaned out and caught his hands in her own. " 'Tis late, Hugh. I had—" Her voice shook in the intensity of her relief. "I had thought that you would not come." She drew him nearer, and as she did so the subtle odor of the jasmine woke in him an agony of longing.

"Could I have stayed away?" he asked passionately as he fondled her arms. "Nay, I would have forded hell to have come to you tonight! Meant ye not that I should come, Kate? Will ye be cruel to me now?"

She hesitated, she scarcely knew what it was that she desired, but she drew him toward her and in the next moment he was in the room and she was in his arms.

"Kate?"

She struggled a little. "Nay, Hugh," she protested. "I had not thought—"

But he pressed her close, and suddenly her arms

were about his neck and her lips, as eager as his own, were returning his kisses.

"Kate?" he whispered again.

She drew his head down, again their lips clung, and she relaxed passive in his arms.

CHAPTER VII

IN the gray light of the following morning Cruger, with Maclae in command of the vanguard, marched from Ninety Six to the relief of Augusta. A half mile ahead of the column, twenty men of Poston's sort scoured the woods, the swamps and the wayside thickets. Behind the scouts came the regulars and the loyal militia followed by the packhorses and the artillery. The expedition moved in haste, for it was possible that Browne had already been forced to surrender in which case all Georgia would soon blaze with rebellion.

However, Maclae, riding debonairly in the forefront of the detachment, left all such gloomy reflections to his commander. The younger man wore the air of a conqueror; to himself, he felt that at last he was justifying himself; and it seemed to him that success in love previsioned success in war. He had not realized before how much a man, cooped up, as he had been, on a sullen frontier, could rejoice in the multiple stimuli of love and action. He would have welcomed an opportunity to lead a charge, and cocked a keen ear in anticipation of shots ahead.

In his present mood, the knowledge that some day he must face his mother—that some time a solution must be found for the situation which he had left

behind him in New York—seemed of small moment. New York was far away and the feet of his mount rang right merrily upon the hard clay of the red, Carolina road.

"Kate—sweet Kate!" he murmured to himself as in some hidden corner of his brain memory reproduced accurately the delights of her embrace and kisses.

But listen as he might, the Lieutenant heard neither shot nor alarm. The column moved onward, rapidly it seemed to the sweating infantry, creepingly it appeared to the anxious and impatient Cruger who, at the end of each half mile, feared to meet a breathless fugitive saying that Browne had been taken.

No such messenger came, however, and at the end of the second day the advancing British reached the eastern bank of the Savannah. There, in the last rays of the setting sun, Cruger saw that which he had longed to see. Over the white trading house, bravely and defiantly, the flag of England still billowed in the gentle breeze.

To Clarke on the western bank, commanding only hastily gathered and undisciplined militia, the huzzas of Cruger's veteran infantry conveyed the necessity for immediate retreat, and as the Americans withdrew, the sorely tried detachment of the beleaguered Browne issued forth from their narrow quarters. Two days later, Clarke was convoying the entire

whig population of the neighborhood—these, with their women and children, their oxen and asses, their horses and blackcattle, and their wagons piled with household goods—to a refuge beyond the North Carolina hills. Augusta had been relieved without a battle.

Cruger made no effort to pursue the escaping Americans—to have done so would have taken him too far from his fixed post at Ninety Six. He did order a detachment of Georgia tories to dog Clarke's footsteps and harass him as they might be able. Then he sent for Maclae.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I shall not order ye, but have ye the will to volunteer for dangerous service?"

"What a man may dare in the King's service, that will I," answered the young man. "Will ye set forth your wishes, sir?"

"Ye have spoken as I had expected," answered Cruger with satisfaction. "None doubt your zeal or your courage. Could ye but temper the latter with some discretion— Aye in the matter in hand discretion is, in truth, more important than valor."

"But not, I trust, incompatible with it," returned Maclae quickly.

"No, not so at all, but in this enterprise the two should march abreast."

"And so they shall, sir—I give ye my word on't," pledged the younger man heartily.

"I thank ye. 'Twill the better further my plans

that ye reach Ferguson's camp in safety than that ye should die doing battle for the King in the midst of his enemies."

" 'Tis to Ferguson then that ye would send me?"

"Aye. 'Tis my wish to apprise him of the direction that Clarke hath taken. Should he move promptly he may be able to cut the rebels off before they reach the mountains. Will ye essay the journey? I'll supply ye a guide who knows the country."

"The task jumps with my inclination," exclaimed Maclae eagerly. "I shall saddle and ride at once; and for a guide, sir, may I take the man, Poston?"

"Yes, detach him to your service, if you like, but see to't that he befuddle ye not with his lying. I bid ye farewell and wish ye luck. Furnish yourself sufficiently for the attempt and see that ye make speed!"

Three hours later Maclae and Poston were riding northward. Seventeen miles above Augusta they swam their horses across the river and made camp for the night in a canebrake on the Carolina shore—the cane serving equally as provender for the horses and as concealment for the men. It was no promenade that the two were undertaking. There were outlying men in abundance between Cruger and Ferguson and two good horses were a sufficient enticement for an attack from lurking whigs, to say nothing of such human prizes as a British officer and a noted tory.

Long before daylight, they were again in the saddle, and since it was necessary to move with the utmost caution, Poston now avoided all the roads and

even the bridlepaths. With an almost uncanny sense of direction, he led his companion through the silent and untenanted forest, now plunging through a stream, now wading some dreary and desolate marsh. But at nightfall they came to a log hut in the wilderness.

Here the tory stopped, and by virtue of some previous acquaintance and the persuasive power of a bottle of rum which he carried, the travellers secured a meal of corn pone and bear's bacon. This was supplemented by a bitter brew distilled from parched acorns—a drink which Maclae could not bring himself to swallow and which Poston eschewed in favor of the rum. Their hunger being satisfied, they rode on under the stars.

The sun was rising when they came to Fairforest Creek. Here they had expected to find Colonel Ferguson's command but Ferguson, having already received intelligence of Clarke's movement, had marched on the day preceding toward Gilbert Town in North Carolina. Being thus immediately in Ferguson's rear, the two felt that they were in comparative safety and so proceeded to the house of a nearby tory to seek rest and refreshment. Thence they followed the advancing British at such a pace as their jaded mounts could command and overtook the swifter moving Colonel only after he had reached Gilbert Town.

In the meantime, notwithstanding Ferguson's effort to intercept him, Clarke had arrived safely at

the overmountain settlements on the Nolachucky and the Wautauga. Irritated by the escape of his prey, Ferguson sent a messenger to the people of these settlements telling them that he purposed to cross the mountains, burn their cabins and hang their leaders.

"By God, if the redcoat Colonel is hunting a fight, we will take it to him," Nolachucky Jack Sevier had replied; and he sent out his runners forthwith to stir the hillmen into action.

Once assembled, in small parties and by unfrequented routes these Indian fighters of the remote North Carolina borders crossed the ranges and descended the eastern slopes of the Balds and the Smokies. They travelled light, as they were accustomed to do, and on horseback. Each man carried, besides his rifle, only a blanket, a pouch of parched corn, and a tin cup. Finding that Ferguson had abandoned his design and was moving eastward from Gilbert Town, they followed him into South Carolina and at Cowpens were joined by Williams and others of the backwoodsmen of the lower province.

Ferguson, having been ordered by Cornwallis who was advancing northward, to get in touch with the main body of the British army, had fallen back from Gilbert Town toward Charlotte and by force of circumstances, Maclae and Poston had accompanied his column. Hearing that the mountain men were seeking to attack him, the British Colonel posted his command on a spur of a considerable elevation which

he named "King's Mountain." Informing Cornwallis of his action he boasted "that all the rebels in hell" could not drive him from his chosen position. His preparations being completed, he coolly sat down and awaited his adversaries.

On the evening of the sixth of October, Poston sought out Maclae. A thin rain was falling and Ferguson's campfires shone as wan points of light against the darkness of the misty night. It was by one of these fires that Maclae was sitting.

"I ha' some news, Leftenant," the tory announced.

Maclae was wet and somewhat miserable. "For God's sake, let's have it if 'tis cheerful," he answered.

"I dunno if 'twill cheer ye or not—'tis as it strikes ye," commented the woodsman. "A countryman hath come in with news for the Colonel. I ha' had speech with him and he allows that the mountain men are hot on our trail."

"They would hunt Ferguson, would they?" inquired Maclae cynically. "God send that some day they will travel to hell and find the Devil at home. But I fancy that, following Ferguson, they pray most heartily that they do not overtake him."

" 'Tis said that they seek a battle. Nigh fifteen hundred of 'em have ranneyvood at the Cowpens. Shelby and Sevier are thar from the Overhills, likewise Campbell of Virginny, and McDowell, Cleveland, and Williams."

"Then there's action toward," observed Maclae, rising and stretching himself. "Gad, I'd welcome a

sharp encounter—stap me, if I wouldn't! 'Tis a dreary business, this seesawing hither and yon. Have ye further particulars?"

"As I said, they foregathered last night at the Cowpens—at the plantation of a King's man named Sanders. Owin' to Sanders's politics, they killed his beeves and barbecued 'em."

"Egad, so much of your story hath an air of truth. Your lousy outlyer hath a rare fondness for barbecuing other people's cattle. But let us get on. The feast having been set forth and consumed, what followed?"

"Once they had filled their bellies with bull meat, they picked nine hundred of their best men and horses and are ridin' hell-for-leather hitherward."

"Well, call me when they arrive," suggested Maclae nonchalantly, as he wrapped his blanket about him and sought for a dry place in which to lie down.

"Leftenant?" persisted the tory.

"What is it?"

"I like not this camp of our'n."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Why 'tis an open, rocky ridge. What's to hinder that lot o' rapscallions from lyin' in the brush yonder and pickin' us off at their leesure?"

"Nothing other than our infantry. Since 'tis open, 'tis a sweet place in which to push home a charge. Saw ye ever a body of militia who could stand the thrust of the bayonet?"

" 'Tis fearsome, the cold steel, certainly," admit-

ted the woodsman. "The baggonet will break a line, but what if there be no line? 'Tis a poor practice—fighting a wasps' nest with a baggonet."

"Get ye into your blanket and allow me to sleep," commanded Maclae stretching himself out on the ground.

The morning broke lowering and gloomy, and the drums beating reveille in Ferguson's camp sounded as if muffled by the murk. Notwithstanding the rain, however, Ferguson's veteran troops stood to their arms right sturdily and evidenced no shrinking from the clash at arms which everyone felt to be impending. At about nine o'clock a horseman left the camp and rode down the mountain—Ferguson was sending a messenger to Cornwallis.

All through the night the Americans had been pushing forward over the muddy roads. To protect their gunlocks from the rain, they had wrapped their rifles in their blankets and coats, thus baring their own bodies to the elements rather than risk the efficiency of the weapons on which the fate of the morrow would depend. At eleven in the forenoon their vanguard encountered Ferguson's messenger and captured him. This was a lucky stroke—Cornwallis lay at Charlotte, only thirty-five miles away.

Toward midday the clouds began to break and the sun shone through. The sight of sunshine cheered the British on the mountain and in the warm rays they spread their damp blankets to dry.

"Our beef-consuming friends delay their tryst,"

laughingly remarked Maclae to De Peyster, Ferguson's second in command.

De Peyster, who had some experience of these riflemen, shook his head. "They'll come," he predicted, and went to strengthen his guards.

Shortly after three in the afternoon, that portion of the guard posted on the northern edge of the plateau came suddenly to attention. Immediately they began to fire. The reports of their muskets hushed the clamor of the encampment. In the next moment, Ferguson's silver whistle sounded and the longroll of the drums began. Hastening to the point of alarm, Maclae saw passing over a prolonged shoulder of the hill a silent double-column of gaunt and serious men. It was upon these that the picket was firing.

"Give them another volley," called out the young officer to the sergeant in charge of the guard.

From the American column another voice was heard. "Hold your fire, men," it said. "Don't waste a shot."

Maclae, being unattached to any definite command, hurried back to the rapidly forming lines of the main body of the British. "The ball has opened," he called out to De Peyster, but before the other could answer a crackle of rifle fire encircled the base of the hill. The Americans had surrounded the position and were pressing upward, firing as they came.

Ferguson sounded his whistle a second time. He was mounted now and rode furiously from one side

of the plateau to the other, endeavoring to order his battle. Already, in the British ranks, men were falling and dying. In the northwestern quarter, where the mountain was least steep, Lacey's South Carolinians, impatient as Carolinians are wont to be, broke with a yell from the cover of the woods and at a run pushed toward the British line. Heading a body of loyalist riflemen, Ferguson, still sounding his whistle, hurled himself against these and by an impetuous onslaught temporarily stayed their advance.

In the meantime Campbell and his Virginians had, at the southeast of the mountain, crept up the steepest portion of the acclivity—at this point almost a cliff—and were now appearing above the lip of the plateau. Toward this new attack De Peyster launched a detachment of regulars armed with musket and bayonet, and with these in their massive charge went Maclae with no more in his hands than his light dress-sword.

"En avant!" he cried with enthusiasm. "We'll see if yon dunghill cocks can stand a touch of the gaff!"

The Virginians, having only empty rifles, did shrink before the regulars back to the shelter of the trees but not before their fire had decimated their foes. But by this time Shelby's men—Indian fighters from the Wautauga and the lower Holston—had brushed aside a thin screen of tory opposition and were ascending the mountain directly in rear of Maclae. Gaining the ridge, the Tennesseeans made

their presence known by pouring into the backs of the regulars a withering volley. Indeed the battle had now become general. The mountain smoked like a volcano, and the air was filled with the whip-like crack of the rifles and the rolling volleys of the musketry. Intermingled with these were cries, shouts, groans, the sharp commands of the officers, and the shrilling of Ferguson's whistle as he dashed back and forth encouraging his breaking lines and restoring his battle.

Surprised by the attack of Shelby, but not yet dismayed, Maclae coolly wheeled his detachment about and faced his new enemies. Like the Virginians, the Wautauga men broke and retired before the menace of his bayonets, but the former, at the same instant, had also turned about and now were reascending the hill. At the other extremity of the camp, De Peyster, with the remaining regulars, was similarly exhausting himself, being whipsawed, like a maddened bull in a hornets' nest, between Cleveland and Sevier.

Maclae turned a second time to the Virginians. Three times successively he charged these and the Tennesseeans, and three times each of these dropped back into the timber and eluded his thrust. He was bleeding now—a bullet had scraped his shoulder—and panting from his exertions.

"Back!" some one ordered. "Back to back around the wagons!"

Half of Maclae's detachment was down, but the remainder were seasoned soldiers. Foot by foot, still

dangerously alert, they gave ground—Maclae steadying them with his orders—until their elbows touched with those of the other detachments. The British were now hemmed in a lessening circle about the dead ashes of their campfires, but still they shook the sweat and blood from their eyes, levelled their bayonets, and stood firm. All knew that the end was near, for the Americans, declining that mute challenge to closer combat, kept at a distance and made accurate practice with their deadly Deckard rifles.

Flesh could stand it no longer and some one raised a white flag. Swearing that he would not surrender to such damned banditti, Ferguson cut the flag down with his sword. Another was raised and this also Ferguson cut down. And all the while, about the doomed circle, the flame of battle roared and seared.

"To your saddles!" cried the Colonel to a group of officers, among whom stood Maclae. "Damn them, we'll ride the scoundrels down and thus win through to Charlotte and Cornwallis!"

Did he think such possible or did he prefer the pride of death rather than the humility of surrender? Whatever their commander's thought, his officers did not hesitate. Maclae ran for his horse as did the others. Three fell, killed or wounded, in the very act of mounting; but Ferguson at the head of the others charged directly into the Americans.

The glittering prominence of Colonel and his

staff, as well as the younger officer's travel-stained uniform, probably saved the life of Maclae. His companions, to a man, fell—Ferguson was hit by twenty bullets—but Maclae's mare, running like a swallow flies, bore him safely to the shelter of the woods.

As he reached the cover of the forest, he glanced swiftly backward. On the crest of the mountain the third white flag was rising—De Peyster was surrendering.

"Yield ye!" A man armed with a long rifle had stepped from behind a tree.

But Maclae's blood was up, and the sight of that white flag on the mountaintop had infuriated him. His sword—a light thing—was still in his hand and, caring not whether he lived or died, he spurred straight down upon his adversary. Clubbing his rifle—evidently he had discharged and had not yet reloaded his weapon—the militiaman avoided the horse by again seeking the cover of the tree, and Maclae's mare shot by him at tremendous speed.

A hundred yards, the excited animal bore her rider before she could be controlled; and when, at last, she was checked, Maclae, looking behind him, could perceive no one. For a short space, he sat hesitant with the iron of defeat entering into his soul; then he rode forward, reflecting bitterly that he had meant to die as Ferguson had died and had failed even in that.

But youth is resilient, and after a half hour's progress his will to live began to return. Presently he stopped. The question "Ninety Six or Charlotte?" arose in his brain, for the two lay in opposing directions. Charlotte was thirty-five miles away and Ninety Six nearly a hundred, but the latter was his proper station and, besides, Kate was there. He dropped the reins on the neck of his mare, examined the priming of his pistols, and continued to ride south.

At ten in the evening he came to a cabin some fifteen miles from the battlefield. Weary and desperate, he stopped and demanded shelter. There was no one at the place save two women, but these granted his plea and asked no embarrassing questions. After feeding his horse and examining his surroundings, he concluded that the calling of his hostesses was doubtless an old and questionable one.

Whatever their moral defects, the women were as angels of mercy to Maclae. They fed him, they washed his wound in raw spirits and bound it up, and they put him to bed. In the morning he handed them a broad piece of gold with his thanks, and went on his way.

About the middle of the forenoon he debouched from the bridle-track that he had been following into a main-travelled road. Ten minutes later some one from the shelter of a roadside tree called out the sharp order: "Halt!"

Maclae turned quickly. From behind the tree there was a thrust a hatless head which was rudely bandaged with a strip of cloth evidently torn from the tail of a striped shirt. His pistol was already half way out of its holster when he recognized the face.

"Poston?" he exclaimed, scarcely willing to believe his eyes.

The tory acknowledged the salutation with a grin.

"How came you here?"

"On a pair of damned sore feet," acknowledged the other abandoning the tree and limping forward.

"Ye escaped? Ye were not present at the surrender?" inquired Maclae.

"At the very beginnin' o' the action they creased me," explained the woodsman, removing the bandage and exhibiting a bloody furrow on the side of his skull. "Then as they went on up the mounting, they overran me. When I came to, the fightin' was away up, nigh the top. It not bein' my nature to endure sich an argyment in my posterior, I came away. 'Twas well I did—Ferguson is dead and the army surrendered, they say."

" 'Tis too true, and my faith in wisdom goes bankrupt," commented Maclae. "Such an ending is contrary to the art of war. But how had you the tidings?"

"Several o' the men from Dunlap's old command passed me. They are a ridin' for the Saludy as if

their shirttails were afire and the Devil a-pitchforkin' their hindquarters."

"Well, let us move. Ye may, for a space, ride behind me."

It was on the afternoon of the third day following King's Mountain that the fugitives reached Fowler's farm. News of the battle had preceded them.

"Mistress Kate, your war-worn servant!" cried Maclae, stumbling into the house and into the arms of the girl. But Poston made his way to the kitchen.

After they had been refreshed, the wayfarers were brought into Anthony's chamber. When they had concluded their recital, the old man shook his head.

"Soon yon will be the fate of Ninety Six," he prophesied.

"Ninety Six will yield in no such manner," objected Maclae. "Ferguson was ever overconfident. Ninety Six is intrenched and 'twill be held until—"

"Until it is surrounded and ye are taken," interjected Anthony. "After which," he added half humorously, "the Ruling Elder, mayhap, will hang the three of ye—yourself, Dunlap, and Poston—to the memory of his destroyed buildings."

Kate started to her feet. "Did Colonel Pickens so," she threatened intemperately, "and I'd pistol him with my own hand!"

"Modyjew," muttered uncouth Amelie, who had

shuffled in on some errand and who now was eyeing Maclae with extreme disfavor. "Sometimes death lurketh in a little dish, sometimes it is a thin steel moving in the dark, sometimes—"

"Peace, wench!" admonished Anthony.

"If I die not save by Pickens's halter," laughed Maclae lightly, "then someday I'll be riding nostril to croup with immortality."

" 'Tis apt that a cockerel should crow lustily," answered Anthony, "and I like ye none the less for't."

" 'Twas said yesterday," remarked Kate thoughtfully, "that McCall and Clarke tarry at the Long Canes to cover Pickens while he gathereth a following."

"At the Long Canes?" ejaculated Maclae in surprise. "Why 'tis within twenty miles of the post. Doth Cruger know?"

" 'Twas from the Colonel that I had it," answered the girl.

"Then doubtless Cruger will move at once."

Still, more than two months elapsed and December was well advanced before Cruger sent Major Allen to drive the intruders away.

In the meantime Maclae had returned to his quarters in Ninety Six. There he found awaiting him his commission as Captain, a box, and a packet of letters. The box and one of the letters was from his mother. She wrote:

My Dear Sonne:

I take advantage of Capt. Winslow's sloop a sailing to the south'ard to indite you some lines, likewise to forrard you a chist of cloathes whitch perchanst you will need. Y'r draff for fifteen poun, Englishe, of dayt of August the tenth was presented to me by Comisary Bell and hath been duly discharged. I trust that ye want nothing and would not have ye stint yourself, albeit y'r expence should be small in so God-forsaken spot as ye discribe. It pleaseth me to hear of y'r advancement, but I counsell ye, as I have ever done, to a moderate and sober deportment. All goeth well with us hear. The town sence Sir H. Clinton's ball hath been dull. Both Bettina Van Clear and I had cards to the intertainment. 'Twas a most genteel affaire. My rewmatism forbids my dansing even did such exercise not appere unsuited to my grey'd hair. But I did e'en go to pleasure Bettina, she having no nigh female relacion, and was hapy to see the dere child so mery. For all her dansing, you know well where her hart is. 'Tis to the south'ard in the King's service. Bettina speaketh prettily concerning you and wondereth when His Ma'esties affaires will permit y'r return. She hath a competent dowry and quite a noble country-seat sum miles up the river. The time approacheth, my dere sonne, when ye must chuse a companion. I counsell ye to think upon it. Do ye not esteem Bettina handsum? It seemeth to me that her charms increase from day to day. I pray that this writing may find you well and in safety. I, as well as Bettina, long to look upon ye. When did ye last write the swete child? I broke yestere'en the shugerpot to my chaney teaset. I am well but for my rewmatism—rewmatism it is, albeit a cock-a-whoop army surgeon who lodgeth here termeth it the gout. I sh'd know, I think, what 'tis that aileth me. My respecks

to C'l Cruger whom I trust useth ye well. I give ye, my d'r sonne into the keeping of Almighty God who will purtect ye. Do not fayle to write some lines to Bettina.

Yr loving mother, Rosina Maclae.

To Capt'n Hugh Maclae,
Of his Ma'sties Armies to the South'ard,
By the hand of Cap'n Winslow of the Kite sloop.

P. S.

Hugh, do not forget to change y'r cloathing when ye come in wett.

CHAPTER VIII

THE winter had passed and the spring had come. Into the window of Kate Fowler's bedchamber the light of the coming day thrust itself, revealing the outlines of the high, four-posted bedstead, the massive oaken chest, and the heavy washstand which, with the exception of one or two straightbacked chairs, constituted the sole furniture of the severely simple apartment. Instantly responsive, since she was a frontier woman, to the first slight touch of illumination, the girl stirred beneath the patchwork quilts that covered her, opened her eyes, streched her limbs luxuriously, and yawned.

Thus she lay for a moment half dreaming, half conscious of reality; then with a sudden movement of her shapely limbs, she thrust the covering aside and rose. In her bare feet and clad only in her nightdress, she crossed the floor and threw open the casement of the window. A rush of fresh air, clean, cool, and stimulating enveloped and seemed to caress her. She lifted her head and breathed deeply; the odors of freshly turned earth, of woodsmoke, and of last year's leaves, fallen and damp with the dew, penetrated her nostrils.

A half mile away, somewhere between the house and the junction of the brook with the river, a turkey

yelped—a wild bird, no doubt, drunken with the wine of the spring and seeking a mate—while from the barnyard her own gobblers answered the challenge belligerently. The older hens of the species, experienced in the prenuptial antics of the males, paid little attention to this vocal duel, but now and then a poult of last year, newly come to maturity and moved by a vague longing, chirped shrilly in token of an awakened interest. To the profane dialogue of the swaggering tom-turkeys, the birds added a more musical chorus of piping and twittering; while the cocks, leading their harems afield, punctuated the entire medley with their vainglorious and vociferous crowing.

Spring o' the year! Spring o' the year! Spring o' the year!

reiterated a mockingbird, balancing precariously on a swaying twig.

The girl at the window was as emblematic of the season as was the song of the bird. The semi-transparent folds of her garment enhanced rather than obscured her rounded limbs and the perfected opulence of her well-developed body. She did not appear fragile, evanescent, otherworldly; she was as real and as full of promise as an unsown field, as alive and as receptive as the brown earth in summer.

The growing illumination revealed more and more the dark loveliness of her figure—the loveliness of

the dusky evening rather than that of the infantile dawn, the beauty of the mysterious, dangerous, baffling night rather than the fair commonplaceness of the obvious daylight, while from her eyes shone, not the honesty of innocence, but the honesty which owes nothing to inexperience. Thus in the last faint shadows of the vanishing darkness, she faced the day; the east was reddening, and across the gray radiance of the sky there crept a tinge of gold.

She lingered for a moment only; then from a peg on the wall she took down a rude hunting horn. Placing the instrument to her lips, she blew a not unmusical blast, which was followed by another and another, until the far away woodlands echoed with the clamant reveille. This done, she dressed herself; and presently knew that her summons had been heeded, since there were threads of smoke beginning to rise from the chimneys of the negro cabins. It was spring, it was the time of seeding and of germination, and it behooved the folk on Fowler's plantation to be early astir.

During the winter there had been many changes elsewhere though but few at Ninety Six. Greene had long since replaced Gates as Commander of the Continental army. Cornwallis, unable to occupy the forests, had been subtly sapped of his strength by the outlyers who harbored in the swamps and the woodlands. In one place he had lost a trooper, in another a detachment, in a third a convoy. Nor did the advancing season bring with it a cessation of such

assaults. The British army was being bled to exhaustion through a multiplicity of tiny wounds.

In addition, in early January, the royal forces had suffered a capital loss comparable only to Ferguson's defeat—a disaster traceable, in part at least, to the resumption of arms by Pickens. In December General Greene, with the main body of the Continental army, had established himself at Charlotte. Early in January he had detached Daniel Morgan and had sent him to threaten Ninety Six.

Morgan had marched toward the fords of the Pacolet river and Pickens, from a point beyond the Long Canes, had moved by way of the foothills of the Blue Ridge with the intention of joining the larger force. To check this movement, Cornwallis had sent Colonel Tarleton in pursuit of Morgan. Upon Tarleton's approach, Morgan had begun a slow retreat, but Pickens having arrived, the Americans had halted and faced about at Cowpens. There, within a few miles of the North Carolina line, they had defeated Tarleton and had practically destroyed his entire command.

Then, too late, Cornwallis had moved to intercept Morgan before the latter could rejoin Greene. Greene and Morgan, retreating hastily along converging lines toward Virginia, had outmarched the British commander and had finally succeeded in conveying their booty and prisoners to a place of safety. This being accomplished, Greene had begun a countermarch and now, according to the latest advices

received at Ninety Six, was posted at Guilford Courthouse in North Carolina. This point Cornwallis was leisurely approaching, and Cruger was awaiting with some anxiety the result of the expected collision.

None of these events had seriously alarmed either Maclae or the Fowlers. Their consequences, plainly to be perceived later, were not then apparent. The royalists still held Ninety Six securely, Kate's farming engaged her energies while her love for Maclae satisfied her emotions, and the young man, on his part, pursuing love, beauty, sunlight, and the joy of living, took no thought of the morrow. Indeed, in the long, dull years that came afterward, this time, so uncertain and exhausting to those in authority, was recalled by Kate Fowler as her period of greatest peace and intensest happiness.

Consequently, on this mild, clear morning in March, she had a song on her lips as she put her domestic and agricultural machinery in motion. In less than an hour breakfast had been cleared away, Amelie was clattering the pots and pans in the kitchen, and the other negroes were on their way to their work in the fields. Then, having seen the day well begun, the young woman saddled her horse and set out for the town. Her business there was of small moment but in addition to that she reckoned confidently on seeing Maclae.

Having reached the end of her journey, she found the village in a state of rejoicing. A band was playing, the regimental colors were displayed, and the

civilians who thronged the streets were throwing their caps in the air and huzzaing—those among them most suspected of disloyal sentiments being among the more vociferous.

Kate, as she rode down the narrow street, beheld the spectacle with some surprise.

"What is all this about, Billy?" she asked of a fleshy individual who, on account of carrying his liquor badly, had withdrawn himself somewhat from the crowd. "Do ye celebrate, today, the repetition of some ancient miracle?"

"Miracle?—eh?— No, 'tish vict'ry," he answered with owlish gravity. "Gloriush vict'ry! His Ludship —hic—hath beaten Greene."

"Where did this happen?"

"No'th Calliny som'ers. I fergit—hic—fergit—"

"Guilford Courthouse was it?"

"Mought be—"

Perceiving that her informant's state was such as to discredit him as a source of information, the girl rode on. When she had arrived at a suitable spot she dismounted, tethered her horse, and divested herself of her ridingskirt. These adjustments made, she started in the direction of the village inn.

Presently Maclae joined her. "Ah, ye're early, my angel, and I thereby the sooner happy," he exclaimed gaily although his cheeks were flushed and his eyes somewhat heavy. "Let us step into Dame Sullivant's private parlor where we may take more of ease."

"Are ye not celebrating the triumph to the north-

'ard?" she inquired as they sought the suggested retreat.

"That I have done already," he confessed. "The express reached us late last evening although the news was not broken to the commonality until today. In view of our late reverses 'twas a most welcome hearing and I fear that some of us made a night of it."

"Then were ye already happy," she commented archly, "and have need of no angel—nor even of so poor a thing as a woman."

"Victories bring only satisfaction," he commented with a bow. "It requireth your presence, my queen, to bring me happiness."

"So?" she replied laughing lightly. "And I am your queen! 'Tis an exalted station, to be sure. Hugh, my treasure, an you do really lie to me, I compliment you that ye are a liar of parts and discrimination. What woman is't who would refuse to incline an ear to so pleasing a taradiddle?"

" 'Tis no lie!" he avowed a suspicion too warmly. "Were ye a man, dear as ye are to me, you should answer for't. As it is I shall punish your lips."

He attempted to kiss her, but she drew away from him. "Nay, Hugh," she replied wilfully, "my lips yield to no punishment. They are given or they are withheld as it pleaseth me. Ye may kiss my hand, an ye choose."

" 'Tis easier to remove a veil than a glove," he grumbled.

"But my lips are more privily my own than my fingers," she teased.

He sulked a little. The fumes of last night's wine still lingered in his head.

"I never know how to take ye, Kate," he complained. "Whiles ye are tender and again ye are hard."

"It seemeth to me," she remarked archly, "that you have taken me easily—into your arms; but whether or no into your heart, I know not."

"Into my heart? Yes," he asseverated, "into the very citadel of my being. I am insistent because of my need for you. The days are long when I see ye not and my nights lonely because of ye. I lie awake to think of ye. I imagine that if I could but smooth your hands then I might sleep."

"At night, ye should forget me, Hugh," she chided. "An you take not your rest, how can you do your work?"

"When I sleep, I dream that I am with you; when I wake, I am disappointed—"

"In me, Hugh?"

"Nay, in myself; in that I have not yet found courage to convey you away from yon farm and hold you against the world and for myself alone."

"Would you think so to hold a woman, Hugh—by violence?"

"No—I am not so stupid. Dunlap tried that game and the wench died on him."

At the mention of the tory Captain's name, the

girl's brow contracted, her eyes narrowed, and her set face exhibited an odd resemblance to that of old Anthony.

"Dunlap!" she exclaimed sharply. "The evil in the man's soul escapes into his face, nor can his black beard hide it. 'Tis well that he chose a Gillian to befool and caress, and not a Fowler. In t'other case, 'twould have been the man that had died, not the wench!"

"I believe ye, Kate. There is something of ruthlessness in you—your very dwelling hath an air of it. An the misfortune had happened to you, ye would have found a way to vengeance; or had ye not so, then your grim father, or the hag Amelie—"

"I, certainly," returned the girl with emphasis. "My father more certainly, despite his grave disability. Amelie most certainly, for she lacketh mercy and hath resources beyond the ordinary. In any extremity, I do assure ye that there will be wanting neither contrivance nor resolution at Fowler's farm."

Maclae shivered—it may have been the brisk March wind succeeding his overheating by wine, or else a momentary glimpse of a dark and possible peril. In a moment he recovered himself.

"How serious we grow," he remarked with forced levity. "What have you and I to do with Dunlap and his amours, albeit I am to ride a-foraging tomorrow under his command."

"Tomorrow? And with Dunlap? I like it not."

" 'Tis not my choosing. I would not, were I con-

sulted, be so far away from ye, Kate. But I am ordered."

"I could wish ye in better company—and safer. I have small regard for Major Dunlap and less for his usages with women; but I fear not for ye there. 'Tis that Dunlap is venturous and unsafe; the last time ye rid with him—"

"We smoked out the old rat, Pickens, eh? Well, doth not the event justify the action? Is he not in arms again? Hath he not, in company with his superior, been well trounced at Guilford—."

"Had it not been for barnburning and oppression there might have been no Guilford," asserted Kate gravely. "And I hear 'tis a question as to how well trounced Greene hath been at Guilford. Hath the American General been put out of action—his men dispersed and himself a fugitive?"

"Nay, I'd not go so far as to say that. Indeed it is because of Pickens that we are sent out tomorrow. He hath returned to South Carolina and we, seeking to add to our own stores, are to withdraw at the same time any possible supply for him."

"Pickens hath returned? How can that be if the Americans were defeated at Guilford?"

" 'Tis passing strange, and yet our scouts report him in the hills beyond the Long Canes. Doubtless with a few followers, he hath eluded Cornwallis and is escaped southward."

"Where is my Lord Cornwallis since the battle?"

"Our advices report him retiring to Wilmington

to rest in the arms of Victory. He hath well earned a short repose."

"Greene I suppose to be fled into Virginia."

"Nay, he hath reoccupied Guilford from which our grenadiers drove him headlong."

" 'Tis to me a most peculiar triumph. The vanquished, it seems, hold the battlefield and the victor fleeth from it."

"Fie, sweet Kate; not fleeth but retireth—with dignity."

"A blight on such dignity! Will the vanquished pursue the victor likely, harass his footsteps, and thus offend this dignity upon which ye set such store?"

"He is, doubtless, afeared to do so. 'Twould be the height of insolence, also damned unsafe!"

"Were I Greene, I know what I would do."

"What, my queen?"

"I sh'd leave Cornwallis to roam at his pleasure through the barrens of North Carolina. As for me, I'd return to South Carolina. Why, Hugh, with Cornwallis and his army gone, every outlying band of whigs will be up and doing. That is why Pickens hath returned; that is why Greene will return. It seemeth clear to me that the King hath lost this province."

"Not so," returned Maclae with spirit. "We hold Charles Town. Our chain of posts in the interior is practically unbroken. Our fortified outstations of Camden, Ninety Six, and Augusta, each within sup-

porting distance of the other, are intact and strong. I tell ye, Kate we hold the rebels securely."

"Fully as securely," scoffed the girl, "as a dog holdeth his fleas. They feed on ye and leave ye when they will. Marion, Sumter, nor Pickens could keep the field a month were it not for the plunder they take from the British wagon trains. Were I Cornwallis, I'd withdraw my posts and let the outlyers starve.—And I had trusted that the war was nigh its close," she ended with a sigh.

"Nay, ye grow bitter, dearest, and downhearted. The future is none so black as ye picture it. All things will have an end save my love for you."

"You are mistaken."

"In what?"

"There is one thing else that will not end."

"And that is—?"

"My love for you. . . . Nay, no kissing—at least not here. The spot is none too secluded; and the passers, although they be well drunken, yet have eyes. Well—well— Quickly then! Now walk with me to my horse."

"You are leaving me?"

"I must. It is high noon. I have been long away, and the afternoon tasks must be set."

As she rode out of the village, she encountered Saul Poston who was sunning himself against the outer wall of the stockade. The presence of the scout recalled sharply to her mind the impending

excursion of Dunlap and Maclae. There was nothing unusual in the adventuring forth of a foraging party, and yet a vague uneasiness as to the outcome of this one oppressed her.

"Saul!" she called.

The tory turned and touched his cap. "Your servant, Mistress Kate," he replied.

"I would speak with you. Do you ride on the morrow with Major Dunlap and Captain Maclae?"

" 'Tis so ordered, Mistress. Colonel Cruger hath information that both meal and bacon are held in some quantity at Beattie's mill for the use of Pickens's militia. 'Tis the Colonel's purpose to seize the stores. I am to guide the party. We march mounted—seventy five men besides the packhorses."

"What think ye of Major Dunlap?"

"God may have made him, Mistress, but the Devil surely had a hand in it. Na'th'less he is a skilled officer and a master hand at a foray."

"Is he a cautious commander—one heedful of the lives of those who are under him?"

"He careth little for any man's life—least of all for his own, I think."

"Think ye that Colonel Pickens lurketh in the neighborhood of Beattie's mill?"

"His camp lieth some twenty miles away, 'tis said."

"Then it is possible that he may intercept you, is it not?"

" 'Tis possible enough. Our hope is that the old Beelzebub doth not learn our intention until it be too late."

"I have something to ask of ye, Saul."

"Yea, Mistress Kate."

"I know you for an excellent woodsman, albeit a man with an overweening taste for poultry."

"Hity-tity, Mistress! Why so long a memory for one poor goose?"

" 'Tis not of the goose that I wish to speak."

Poston smiled. "If not of the goose, then mayhap of the cockerel," he ventured.

" 'Tis concerning Captain Maclae."

"Would ye have him shot? 'Tis childish easy. He goeth with me into the woods to discover a secret—or, it may be, a wench. There are shots—'tis not unusual. I escape from the woods and take refuge with the column. There hath been a bloody ambushment, and—"

Her face whitened. "An such a thing should happen," she threatened, "I'd hang ye with my own hands!"

Poston concealed his grin. "Why should ye worry?" he asked soothingly. "Those who worry will ne'er grow fat. I did but jest. What will ye?"

"That ye regard the Captain's safety. Ten broad pieces will I place in your hand on the day that he rides, untouched, back into the town. 'Tis main dangerous, yon foray under Pickens's very nose!"

"But, Mistress," the scout protested, "I have

small experience in drynursing handsome young men. They be venturesome and hard of control. They will aye be running after maids and the like and, in the dark, are apt to stub a toe or bark a shin. Do you admonish him to have a care as to the maids; and I'll halve the broad pieces with him, if he'll agree to be biddable."

Kate laughed in spite of herself. "Ye know well what I mean for all your clowning," she remonstrated.

"Yea, I know," he admitted, "and on our return he shall ride into the town, e'en though he ride me pick-aback."

"Can ye not be serious?"

"I'm often so—never more so, perhaps, than when I seem to be joking. And since the matter stands as it does with ye, Mistress Kate, your Captain shall return to ye in safety or else one Saul Poston—an apprehender of stray horses and of geese—will remain behind to bear him company. . . . But let us not hurry to meet trouble. Soon enough we'll all be back, and I'll be a-settin in your main chamber a-swiggin' your daddy's rum."

CHAPTER IX

THE foraging column moved in the early morning with Dunlap at its head. Possibly no officer, among the many stationed along the South Carolina border, was so hated and feared as was this handsome, thin-lipped, sneering major. He was a connoisseur in crime and an artist in cruelty. He punished his enemies not with the bludgeon, which crushes brutally and kills quickly, but with the scalpel with which he lifted, in delicate precision and enjoyment, each quivering shred of muscle and nerve. It delighted him more to cause suffering than to cause death. The dead do not react, do not writhe, do not resist, do not pale and start now with a vain hope, now with fear. There was scarcely an outlying man between the Savannah and the Catawba who did not execrate the major's name; there was not a woman in the western clearings who would not have willingly plunged a knife into Dunlap's heart.

Many a rifle had been aimed at the tory officer but no bullet had registered there. In North Carolina he had been tracked down and wounded and left for dead by the father of Mary Gillian, but he had recovered and had made his way back to Ninety Six, where Cruger had welcomed him, not on ac-

count of pleasure in his company but because of the man's remarkable ability as a leader of horsemen. It was a tribute to his skill as a forayer that he was chosen to lead the expedition against Beattie's mill.

Both Dunlap and Maclae—the young captain having been designated as second in command—were well turned out on this brilliant March morning. Their uniforms were new, their brasses were polished, and their horse-trappings glittered in the sunshine. The men who followed them were not so well accoutered. These were, for the most part, tories of the region. They were coarsely clad, were unshorn and unshaven, and bore, instead of the orthodox arms of the cavalry, the long rifles peculiar to the backwoodsmen. But each man was well-horsed —Dunlap had seen to that.

The first few miles of their course traversed the fairly open country adjacent to the town. From this section the irreconcilable whig inhabitants had long since fled. Those who remained were either tories from principle or tories for policy's sake. Beyond this region, protected from hostile raids by the immediate neighborhood of the British post, lay a kind of no-man's-land, largely abandoned since it was open to the incursions of both parties. Only a few families remained in this, and these were accustomed to avow themselves whig or tory according to the occasion and the company. Further on lay the undisputed whig settlements on Little River of which Beattie's mill was the center.

The raiding party had covered fully half the distance between Ninety Six and the mill when the shortening shadows warned them of the approach of noon. Beside a clear pool in a small rivulet, they unsaddled and watered their horses, and then, while their beasts cropped the young foliage of the budding underbrush, they disposed themselves according to their pleasures and lunched on such provisions as their pockets could afford, washing their meal down with sundry potations from the stone jugs which a number of the party carried. At the end of an hour they resaddled and moved on.

Since they were now approaching debatable ground, Poston was presently ordered forward to spy out any possible enemy. The countryside, into which he rode, presented to his view many evidences of depredation and devastation. Many of the houses had been burned, and on such sites the stone chimneys stood gaunt and bare—mute monuments to a former rude prosperity. Elsewhere the dwellings were empty; the broken windows stared blankly upon the highway and the doors, hanging crankily ajar, sagged on their hinges.

After a time, however, the scout perceived a cabin which showed signs of occupancy. A thin smoke rose from the chimney, and from the bushes by the roadside a trio of barelegged, ragged children scurried, like the young of some shy animal, toward the shelter of the deeper woods.

Poston honored them with a glance and halted

in front of the hovel. "Hello the house!" he called loudly.

The call was greeted from within only by the scuffling sound of shambling feet. Nevertheless a woman's head appeared momentarily at a window, and following the disappearance of that, came the cautious creaking of some door at the back of the cabin. Craning his neck, Poston saw a head and the upper part of a rifle moving swiftly and surreptitiously in the direction of a nearby gully. At almost the same moment the children, who had sped away upon such expeditious feet, made a warlike reappearance. Moving as warily as Indians, each provided with an armful of stones, they were approaching the house under cover of the tall weeds which filled the little clearing. Poston watched them until they had sheltered themselves behind a corner of the building.

But as they arranged their rude ammunition and prepared to do battle, he looked to the priming of his own weapon and hailed again.

This time the door of the cabin opened a little way and a skinny woman with a cob pipe between her teeth peered forth cautiously.

"What's wanted?" she demanded.

At the same moment a well-directed stone whizzed, and had it not been for a calculated movement by the scout, the missile might have stricken him from his horse. But further aggressiveness on the part of her offspring was checked by the woman.

"You young uns th'ow when I tells ye to th'ow an' not afore that!" she reproved sharply. Then she turned again to Poston. "Well?" she reiterated.

The scout temporized. "I was a-travellin' by," he explained, "and jest stopped to pass the time o' day. Where's your man?"

She appraised him with a glance—his dress, the condition of his horse, and the direction from which he had come. "There's naught to steal here," she informed him harshly. "And my man mou't be gone to Ninety Six to sell a quarter o' beef."

" 'Tis a distance to the post," commented the scout. "And ef your bully's on the road there, its quare I didn't meet him."

"Likely he thought to save the beef an' tuk to the woods when he seed ye," she retorted dryly.

Poston ignored the implication. "Have ye seen any soldiers?" he inquired.

"Not unless ye be a sodger. Nur am I wishful to see one—they be too apt to take up wi' that which aint ther'n. The last lot I seed stoled our critter."

"Ye're hard spoken, Mistress. I do not wonder now that your man findeth occasion to be often absent. Who hath passed the road this mornin'?"

"Ye're the fust an' I'm hopin' to God ye'll be the last! I ha' no time to be passin' words wi' vagabones."

Tiring of her shrill displeasure, Poston rode on. He was puzzled. In time past he had been acquainted with every person who lived along this road but

these people were strangers—two weeks ago, in passing this way, he had remarked this cabin to be unoccupied. What then was this new family doing here? Were they merely poor, homeless folk drifted hither by the storms of war? Or had they been cunningly planted here by Pickens that they might watch this road? He could not decide, but he rode with less assurance than hitherto.

In the late afternoon the detachment crossed the bridge over Little River, seized the millhouse and its contents, and made camp on the spot. As the evening closed in, little fires appeared among the trees at which ashcakes and hoecakes were baked and bacon broiled. On the outskirts of the bivouac, sentries paced their beats under Maclae's supervision, and within the limits thus set, the remainder of the men roamed about, ate, gambled, or drank, each according to his inclination. Dunlap, with those who had been detailed for guard service, occupied the mill building.

It was perhaps ten o'clock when the sharp report of a rifle was heard. It came from the direction of the bridge and Maclae, with a handful of men, was hurrying thither when an answering report sounded on the opposite side of the camp. At the same moment Poston yelled in warning: "Fires out! We're beset!"

Before the suggestion could be heeded, the single shots were followed by a volley. For a moment the utmost confusion reigned. Men stumbled and fell;

some cried out, some ran for their horses, others stamped out furiously the betraying fires. Presently, however, the men of the surprised detachment got themselves better in hand, and sheltering behind the trees under which they had camped, began a return fire. Maclae, pushing desperately for the bridge, could hear Dunlap's voice steadying and reassuring the riflemen. For his own part, the young Captain realized that the only feasible passage across the river was the key to the situation and was making haste to secure it.

But after a few moments he met two of the guard who had been posted on the bridge dodging back from tree to tree toward the encampment. "Thar's nigh a hundred of 'em thar, Captain," panted one as he strove to staunch the flow of blood from a wound in his neck. "They've a'ready got the bridge."

In the meantime the noise of the combat at the millhouse had risen higher. It was evident to Maclae that the detachment under Dunlap were outnumbered and were being driven. Above the din the voice of the Major could still be heard.

"Into the mill!" he was shouting. "Into the mill for shelter and take me with you! Damn ye, cannot ye see that I'm down!"

Maclae faced his squad about and raced for the building. They were none too soon. As they went, the bullets cut the twigs above them and three of the twelve went down before the party reached the doorway of the mill. Once they were inside, how-

ever, they obtained a short respite since their assailants required time to adjust themselves to this new phase of the struggle.

Maclae found his commander wounded in the hip and lying on some of the sacks of grain with which the building was filled. Notwithstanding his hurt, Dunlap was directing, vigorously and minutely, the preparations for further resistance.

"Barricade the doors," he was saying. "Pile the meal sacks into the windows. No, not solidly—leave loopholes. . . . God, ye are slow!"

The latter as one of the working party, caught by a bullet, spun on his heel and fell heavily.

"Major Dunlap—" Maclae began.

"Ah, 'tis you, Maclae. I thought they had ye. Do you take command in the upper story and I'll hold this floor. . . . Damn the leg; I cannot move! But I'll hold this building! Aye, I'll hold it until hell freezes and the rocks liquefy!"

"But ye are badly wounded," remonstrated Maclae, panting from his recent exertions.

"Never mind me, but do as ye are ordered. Get ye above; they're all confusion there and make no headway. Drive the laggards to it. Ye should be able to make your fire tell—from the upper windows. Mind the roof—"

Maclae waited for no further instructions but took the rude stairs two steps at a bound and came into the second story of the structure. There he found Poston and twenty others. At each of the win-

dows these were erecting a screen from whatever material they found at hand. It was risky work. One of the men was already dead and two wounded.

Wishing to comprehend the situation thoroughly, the young officer hurried to one of the openings and looked out. Poston's hand grasped him, jerking him down, and a bullet knocked splinters from the opposite wall at the same moment. He found himself crouching below the barrier.

"That was a near thing, Captain," commented the militiaman. "Had ye been in the moonlight instead of in the shadow— 'Tis no lie to say that half those bullies out there can hit a squirrel's eye at fifty yards."

Below stairs Dunlap was still raging. "We are caught—caught like rats in a filthy, baited trap," they could hear him roaring. "But there'll be no surrender—I'll be damned if I surrender! If they want me let them come and take me! I'll burn the accursed house and all in it before I'll be taken! Stand up to your work, ye scurvy knaves, or 'fore God I'll pistol ye! Cornered? Yes; but come on ye scullions! Like a cornered rat I'll set my teeth in ye!"

Poston looked at Maclae and shook his head. "Do you hear that, Captain?" he asked.

Maclae swore. "Dunlap remindeth me of a damned soul lamenting," he answered contemptuously. Again, for some reason, the outside firing had lulled.

Poston wiped his mouth. "They've got us safe enough," he observed, "Dunlap well knoweth it."

The young officer made a gesture of negation. "They have not taken us yet," he replied hotly. "They're five to one, 'tis true, but I mean to make it cost them somewhat to enter here."

The other shook his head a second time. " 'Twill cost them little to take us," he remarked gloomily. "Look ye, Captain, they do not need to make entry; 'tis not their purpose. They need but to lie yonder behind the trees and pick us off at their leesure—yes, sir, at their leesure!"

"But what shall we be doing? We need not expose ourselves."

"Will we not? Methinks 'tis more comfortable to be a target than a burnt offering. Consider the dry clapboards of the roof, Captain, and tell me if a single spark will not—"

Maclae turned pale and then red. "I see," he answered. "They'll burn us out!"

"Aye, sooner or later; and shoot us like rabbits as we run."

"How soon, d'ye think—?"

"I think 'twill hardly come to that. At the first smell of smoke your men will mutiny and force ye to surrender. 'Tis odd too," he continued musingly, "that with the certainty of burning hereafter, the rogues should so dread a fire here."

"I shall oppose a surrender," announced Maclae

stiffly. "I have a reputation to make and I sh'd detest being taken."

"I should detest being hung," commented Poston grimly. "See ye here, these be Pickens's followers or at least some part of them. The rebel Colonel hath sworn revenge and he hath in his hand now the three of us—Dunlap, and you, and me. If we are taken, we dance on an uncertain footing. D'ye understand?"

"But," objected Maclae in a voice that endeavored to hide dismay under bluster, "Pickens dare not speak of hanging. 'Tis against the usages. Why did he but hang one of the meanest of us and he himself were taken—"

"Ye forget that the Old Beelzebub's life is already attaint because of his parole," the tory interposed with a touch of impatience. "Once he is taken, he can be hanged but once."

" 'Tis damnable unfair," protested Maclae weakly.

Before he ceased speaking a meteor seemed to rise from among the trees, to describe a high arc, and to descend toward the roof of the mill.

" 'Tis begun," ejaculated Poston, pointing. "Yon was a firearrow. I knew that the louseheads were breeding trouble for us when their firing slacked. Listen."

There were sounds of an altercation below. Out of the confusion of voices Maclae could distinguish

that Dunlap was being urged to surrender and that the Major was threatening his interlocutors with his pistol. The clamor grew, a shot followed, then the fall of a heavy body and a sudden silence. Maclae started for the stair.

Poston stayed him. "Nay, Captain," he expostulated. "You but expose yourself and accomplish nothing. Even by shooting, Dunlap cannot hold them now. The roof is already ablaze—I can smell the brimstone."

Maclae hesitated. "Ye consider, then, that escape is impossible?"

"Not impossible," replied the imperturbable tory. "Not even improbable for the two of us. But, an we succeed, there must be no more than two."

The turmoil below had arisen again. Oaths, cries, and a rush of many feet succeeded each other. Even the men in the upper story had now abandoned their posts and were scrambling for the stairs. Maclae moved to intercept these, but again the scout interfered.

"Let them go," he advised. "They do but cumber us. In ten minutes the flames will be through the roof and the j'ists will be afire. The Major's pistol will not hold them now."

Dunlap was still swearing, and Maclae could picture the impotent, tearing rage of the man. Again there came to his ears the rush of feet and again the Major's pistol spoke, but this time the fear of death

had so wrought upon his troopers that even death itself had no power to stay their mad rush into the one avenue that seemed to promise life.

"Quarter! Quarter!" they were screaming, some from the windows, some as they struggled to open the barricaded door.

Maclae felt an impulse toward heroism—the moment was opportune for a magnificent gesture. He might plunge down the flimsy stairs, broadsword in hand, he might force his way to the spot where Dunlap lay and there astride his wounded commander defy the odds against them, and he might do glorious and sanguinary battle there until death came and closed the scene. The idea had its attractions.

But the dead are deaf and hear no plaudits. Quite suddenly his mind descended from its romantic Horeb to the inanities of commonsense. He realized that, should he descend, there would be no baresark battle with broadswords, no grandly spectacular pose ending in extinction amid acclamations. He might rush to Dunlap's aid but scarcely would he reach the Major's side before there would come, from somewhere in the darkness, a rifle shot. And he would sink down, and no one would note him, and Dunlap would be not one whit the better.

As he hesitated, Poston plucked at his sleeve. "Come," said the scout. "They are crying quarter, there below, and are opening the door. The rebel scarecrows will be running thither, the better to share in the plunder of the prisoners and the camp.

Now is our time! Lighten yourself of your saber."

Maclae suffered himself to be drawn away. He loosed his swordbelt, as Poston hurried him toward the rear of the building, and dropped the impeding weapon. Above them sounded the roar and crackle of the advancing flames, which now shed a lurid and unearthly light over the surrounding landscape.

"Quarter! Quarter!" men were still crying, although the firing had ceased. The upper story of the mill was now emptied of men save for the Captain and the scout.

The two came to the back window of the millhouse and looked out. They saw no one. Twenty feet below them lay the deep, still water of the millrace, lighted by the blazing roof and motionless as long as the tailgate remained unopened.

Poston shoved the officer toward the opening. "swing out of the window and drap into the water," he directed. "Then swim out on t'other side and wait for me."

With the flames now so near that he was almost scorched, Maclae climbed out of the window and hung suspended by his hands from the sill. He dropped, feet foremost, struck with a splash, sank and rose.

Almost immediately, as he began to swim, his face was touched by the overhanging bushes of the farther bank. Grasping these, he drew himself out of the millrace, crouched on his hands and knees in the undergrowth, and waited.

A moment later he felt Poston's hand on his shoulder. "So far, so good," said the tory in a low voice. "Now we'll cross the main stream o' the river."

The fire behind them grew hotter, a section of the roof fell in, and millions of sparks shot skyward.

"Now! Whilst they watch the blaze yonder!" urged Poston.

They ran, half bent, through the brushwood and came to the stream just below the dam. There was shoal water there with flat rocks that broke the foaming current. The noise of the rapids covered the sounds made by their movements. They plunged into the stream, took advantage of the great flat stones, and reached the farther shore without swimming.

They emerged at the foot of a bluff, tree-clad and with its steep slope encumbered by a stiff growth of laurel. They toiled up the difficult incline aided by the light of the burning mill. After some minutes of climbing, they stood, wet, panting, but unharmed on the crest of the eminence.

Here they halted while Poston took his bearings. "There to the south'ard," said he, "skirting the foot of the ridge, goes the road from the river bridge to Ninety Six. 'Twould be our nighest way and a deal the easiest travellin', but 'twon't do. Doubtless it is picketed and we'd be picked up inside a mile. 'Tis best we go up the river a piece, then strike out across the country."

They skirted the valley, keeping generally to the

northeast. It was rough going, even for experienced Poston, while Maclae, unaccustomed to the thickets and blundering clumsily in the darkness, soon found himself weary to the point of exhaustion. So painful and slow was their progress that they had covered no more than six miles when the eastern sky foretold the coming of dawn.

"It'll soon be light," said the irregular. "It's bad territory we're in and we'd best hole up ontell next dark."

After a short search, they found a deep ravine that led from the river back into the hills. Here the woodsman considered it safe to allow themselves a fire during the time that the morning mists would hang low and hide the smoke. They cast about for the means of kindling one. Maclae had his pistol but the priming was wet. Poston had his hunting knife and his powder horn. The latter being tightly plugged, the water had not entered it.

They gathered a handful of dry moss and leaves into a little heap, and Poston cut with his knife some slivers of pine. Then he put a little of his powder into the heap and laid a train from that to a half-thimbleful of the same material about a foot away. He now drew the charge from Maclae's weapon and reprimed but did not reload the firearm. Next, placing the pistol in close proximity to the little pile of free powder, he snapped it.

There was an answering spark from the flint and the powder flashed in the pan of the weapon. Almost

simultaneously there were two other flashes. The heap of moss and leaves was much blown about by the miniature explosion, but as a result of it several particles of the material were ablaze or smoking.

Poston swept the burning bits deftly together, added moss, and nursed the tiny flame with his breath. Presently the slivers caught. In a short time they had a practicable fire.

They dried themselves partially, and stretched out on the earth to rest. When the sun became visible, Poston extinguished the fire. It was late in the afternoon before Maclae woke and sat up. He looked around and found himself alone, but in a few moments heard Poston returning.

"I've been scoutin' around a little," the tory announced, "tryin' to find somethin' in the way of rations. But there ain't any; we're miles from anywhar and since we've got to travel hongry, we'd as well be movin'."

They took up their march, leaving the river valley and striking southeast across the hills. Presently the sun went down, then the darkness came. But Poston scarcely slackened his pace; he was sure of his direction now and strode straight on toward Ninety Six.

When morning came, they found themselves at the little stream where they had rested on the first day of the expedition. They had reached the road at a point beyond the likelihood of pursuit and it would be easy marching back to the post. But they were faint with hunger.

"God!" exclaimed the irregular. "I could bile my leather belt and eat it."

Maclae was too weak to reply. He dropped down on a little knoll and bowed his head into his hands.

Poston looked at him critically. "Captain," he remarked, "we got to find grub. Have ye a bit of gold about ye?"

Maclae fumbled mechanically beneath his waistcoat and produced a sovereign.

"Aye, that's the magic!" commented the woodsman, holding the coin between his thumb and forefinger. "Now set ye thar, Captain Maclae, whilst I ramble." Poston had remembered the house where the woman had been.

The guide set off at a surprising pace, considering that he had travelled all night, and presently arrived at the hut.

"Hello the house!" he called.

This time a man appeared, holding a rifle in the hollow of his arm. "Hello yourself!" he answered gruffly.

"This the road to Ninety Six?"

"Yea."

"I'm a needin' vittles and transportation."

"Ye come to a goat's house a-huntin' wool."

"I ain't particular."

"Could let ye have a hoecake an' some bacon, I reckon. Who be ye?"

"My name's Goolsby—Bill Goolsby," lied Poston fluently. "I'm from the Long Canes on my way to Cruger with a flag from Pickens."

The other's eyes showed an access of interest. "You with Clarke at Beattie's mill night afore last?" he inquired.

"No. I been on the road two days. I got misdirected and then I lost my horse. What happened at Beattie's?"

"They tuk Dunlap. Got ever' man he had!"

"Hurray! Where's Dunlap now?"

"Deader'n hell! He war wounded in the fight and tuk a pris'ner. Then he died afore day, his guard says. I reckin that's so, but Pickens wants to know how come him to die. He warn't wounded 'cept in the laigs. Pickens wanted Dunlap for hisse'f."

"Reckon that's so," assented Poston indifferently. "How about the rations and a horse?"

"Old woman," called out the other, "fry some meat an' make a pone o' bread."

"I'd pay handsome for a critter," insisted Poston, carelessly displaying the gold piece.

The man's eyes betrayed a gleam of interest.

"Ef a man had a horse—say one he had captivated and hid out some'rs—'twould be a fine chance, an' no questions axed, to turn the beast into specie," continued the tory meditatively.

"Mout be," assented the other, glancing furtively toward the woods.

Poston turned the conversation aside and discussed the weather. After a time the woman announced that the food was prepared.

They went inside the cabin.

"A sup o' somethin' wouldn't come amiss," suggested the tory.

The woman produced a small, stone jug. It occurred to Poston that the vessel was quite similar to one that yesterday had formed a part of the commissariat of Dunlap's men. Nevertheless, he drank heartily and in silence. Then he ate.

At the conclusion of the meal, he gathered up some of the cornpone and bacon into a parcel. Placing this provender into the pocket of his hunting shirt, he turned again to his host.

"Now, let's look at the horse," he suggested.

"What horse?"

"That'n ye fotch in last night."

The man's eyes wavered. "How'll ye pay?" he asked.

"All ye git will be clear gain," Poston reminded him. " 'Tis main risky to hold on to a good horse anigh as ye are to the British camp. Tomorrow or next day some un 'll be on ye claimin' the beast to be stolen."

The man stood up. "Foller this way," he suggested.

Poston followed. Although he was armed with a knife only, he felt himself fully a match for his protagonist. In fact, the tory was considerably elated at the result of his own astuteness. He had judged this outlyer to have been a member of the attacking party, therefore not without a share of the spoil of which horses would constitute the principal item.

Presently the two came to a railpen in which there was confined one of Dunlap's pack animals.

"I'll gie ye an order on Pickens for his full valley and a broadpiece o' gold for a sweetener," offered Poston.

The man demurred. "I want all goold," he objected.

"Better take what ye can git," counselled Poston. "From what ye say, Cruger'll have parties out huntin' Dunlap's lost beasts. They mou't mistake yourn for one of 'em."

The man winced. "Two pieces of goold," he urged.

"One," replied Poston firmly.

In the end the irregular got the horse, and with that and his provisions he returned to Maclae.

"Amazing!" commented the officer, as he filled his mouth with bread. "Rations and a horse! Where'd ye get the horse? Or is it fair to ask?"

"Oh, I paid for the critter," replied the irregular calmly, "albeit I'd ha' stole him if I'd had a chance. He's yourn. I paid for him with your gold and a draff on Pickens."

"A draft on Pickens?"

"Aye. And won't the old Presbyterian cuss when he sees that paper."

"But why, then, call the beast my horse rather than yours?"

"That's a private speckilation. I figure 'tis worth

something to me to have ye ride into the post instead o' sneaking in afoot."

"It shall be worth something to ye!" avowed the young man earnestly.

Poston chuckled slyly.

CHAPTER X

GENERAL GREENE, resisting some temptation to follow his late able opponent, moved south at practically the same time that Cornwallis marched north from Wilmington. The two armies, so lately at grips at Guilford were now parted forever. Cornwallis passed into Virginia. Greene, reluctantly, returned to South Carolina and stationed himself within striking distance of the British position at Camden.

In South Carolina, Lord Rawdon had succeeded Lord Cornwallis to the chief command. Rawdon's position was an unenviable one. The withdrawal of the army under Cornwallis had materially weakened the British forces, and the spectacular, if small, successes of Henry Lee, Sumter, Marion, and Pickens had attracted to the partisan camps many woodsmen who up to this time had stood hesitant. Even some of the less resolute tories had been converted by the logic of events and were quietly changing sides.

The partisan bands, which controlled the forests almost as absolutely as did the British the settlements, were perhaps the queerest military organizations which the world has ever beheld. They clothed themselves without aid from the government, fed themselves by tilling their farms in the intervals between their raids, furnished their own munitions, and

came and went each at his own good pleasure. On one day a leader might have five hundred men under his orders and on the next be able to muster only ten. When closely pursued these commands invariably broke into small, scattered parties, thus rendering the chase difficult and the capture, if any were so unfortunate as to be overtaken, inconsequential.

By the death of Ferguson and the departure of Tarleton, the British had lost the only two of their officers who had shown aptitude in dealing with these ubiquitous and mobile American riflemen. The royal cavalry, moreover, was deteriorating and was less effectively mounted than it had been the preceding year, for with spendthrift prodigality the King's horsemen had exhausted the equine resources of the great plantations, while the saddle-beasts of the backwoodsmen were too scattered and too skilfully hidden to be available in any considerable numbers.

Under these circumstances the partisans grew bolder, Marion, aided by Light-Horse Harry Lee, who had been detached by Greene for this service, boldly blocked the roads between Camden and Georgetown, thus rendering highly insecure the British commander's communications with his base. Disappointed in his expectation of reinforcements from Georgetown and aware that Marion was now moving to join Greene, Lord Rawdon felt that it would be folly to wait supinely until the commands of Sumter and Pickens were also before Camden. Consequently on April 19, Rawdon, fully decided on

his course of action, sent an express to Ninety Six summoning every man of the garrison that Cruger could spare to the aid of Camden.

Immediately upon receipt of the order, Cruger dispatched Colonel Fraser, with Maclae acting as the second in command, to his Lordship's assistance. Rapidly traversing the rough country between the two posts, the detachment arrived in Camden on the evening of the 24th to find Rawdon so pressed for men that he was arming the very waggoners and drummer boys of his army. It was Rawdon's purpose to attack Greene on the following morning. Notwithstanding his inferiority in strength, the young Irish Lord was never gayer nor more confident.

Greene had taken position on Hobkirk's Hill for the express purpose of forcing the British into battle. The American commander, also, was confident—in truth, he was overconfident. He did not sufficiently credit the ability of the young soldier—Rawdon was only twenty-seven—who opposed him. Greene established his battle-line to meet a frontal attack and posted his cannon to command the broad road leading into Camden.

But Rawdon declined to accept the plan which his adversary had mapped out for him. At ten in the morning on the 25th—leaving in the town only the sick and helpless—the British commander marched out of his defensive works in a direction exactly the reverse of that which would have ordinarily taken him to Hobkirk's; and with him, in command tem-

porarily of a steady company of the Sixty-third Regiment, marched Maclae. All were in high spirits. Everyone knew that, in spite of appearances, they were not beginning a retreat but were going forth with keen weapons to a battle.

Silently, with no tap of drum or note of bugle, they descended into the valley of Pinetree Creek. Then, under cover of this depression, they turned back toward the north and Greene's unsuspecting flank. Right pridefully did Maclae step out at the head of his veteran company. This, he judged, would be a different thing from King's Mountain and Beattie's Mill. This bid fair to be a proper combat with rank against rank and bayonets clashing.

Deciding, on account of the quiet morning, that Rawdon would not attack that day, Greene had posted his pickets, stacked his arms, and given his men their ease. Pots were boiling and men were bathing, other men were washing their clothes. In his own tent the General had assembled his officers and was engaged with them in the pleasant occupation of "taking a dish of coffee."

Into this arcadian scene there broke an alarm of shots from the picket on the Cheraw road far to the left of the encampment. There Rawdon's whole army had burst out from the cover afforded by the valley of the creek and was advancing in full battle array. And in the very forefront of this advance, Maclae dressed his company as if on parade and saluted Rawdon with a flourish of his sword.

Taken thus by surprise, Greene's Continentals scrambled hastily to their arms and prepared, as rapidly as they might, to meet the onset. They were sturdy troops who had held their own on many a bloody field but time was not given them to establish their ranks. Half in confusion, they were thrust forward to meet the initial shock of the charging Sixty-third. Nevertheless they did not flinch.

Perceiving himself so unexpectedly assailed on the flank, Greene essayed to throw the unengaged right of his line forward and thus to encircle the British left; but Rawdon's quick eye caught this intention in its incipiency and he met the menace by sending his reserve into action. His Lordship knew, whether his troops did or not, that the fate of the battle, and with it the fate of the army, depended on the cast of a die.

Meanwhile, the Sixty-third Regiment, Maclae's company included, drove straight ahead until their bayonets interlocked with those of the Maryland Line under Gunby. The struggle was short and sharp. By some misconception, or perhaps under the sheer weight of the assault, a section of the Marylanders gave ground. In an attempt to restore the line the remainder tried to follow, but Maclae, seizing the opportune moment thrust his company into the gap and ruptured the American battlefront.

Seeing his Continentals thus fall into disorder, Greene at once set himself to the task of withdrawing his troops with a minimum of loss. He threw

William Washington's cavalry into the battle to cover the broken infantry, and abandoned the field.

"A glorious victory, my Lord!" cried Captain Maclae as Rawdon rode past him.

"'Twas a demmed near thing," commented his Lordship. "Na'th'less ye played your part well. My hat is off to the Sixty-third."

Greene fell back to Sanders Creek and halted. Rawdon followed the retiring Americans for two miles and then turned back to Camden. As a matter of fact both Rawdon and Greene were beaten. Rawdon had checkmated Greene in a pitched battle, but the partisan leaders had won the campaign. The men of the woods and swamps had separated the British army from its base and its position in Camden was untenable. Nevertheless Greene was about to abandon South Carolina when news was brought him that Rawdon was leaving Camden.

Lord Rawdon began his retrograde movement toward Charles Town on the ninth of May. Shortly prior to this, he had ordered Maclae, together with the detachment from Ninety Six, back to Cruger. Thus matters stood, when one day Poston stopped at Fowler's farm to exchange gossip and to partake of a jorum of Anthony's rum.

"It beginneth to look, Saul," remarked the invalid as the other began to assimilate his second glass, "as if ye had bet on the wrong horse. I advise ye to hedge. The battle hath not been to the strong, although I grant ye the race to the swift. Which re-

minds me— They say that ye teached Maclae to pace as ye bid farewell, something hastily, to Beattie's Mill."

"Sca'cely to pace," returned the other goodnaturedly, "but I'll allow that we did not tarry. Na'th'less ye'll admit that we have a good report o' the lad from Camden."

"Aye, there he seemeth to have borne himself indifferent well. Still I maintain that it is time ye were hedgin' your bet."

Poston studied the dregs of his liquor as if his glass had been a divining cup. "I drawed my kyards," he announced, "and I'll play the hand as dealt. At the worst, there's Florriday, albeit 'tis a thirsty country. But it do look as if our troops has been handled orkardly by our ginerls."

"Ye had the better generals and the better troops," dissented the invalid. "Had it not been so, ye would have perished long syne. It seemeth to me that the Almighty, or else the Continental Congress who imagine themselves the same, hath grievously afflicted this province in the commanders sent to it. First there was Howe, who was a ninny as ye know; then Charles Lee, fit doubtless to lead a charge of dragoons but for no more; then Lincoln, who was born to be a granny-woman and brew tisanes; and after him Gates, a brass band performer. Finally there cometh this Greene, better than the others yet over cautious and lacking in battle-craft—spendthrift of the militia but tightfisted as the devil when

it cometh to staking a continental. Twice hath he cast a hankering eye to the northward, when in the nick of time some bold stroke by the backwoodsmen hath brought him back to reap where he hath not sown."

"So far he hath reaped only defeats," commented Poston sourly.

"Verily; and yet by the movements of the outlyers his defeats have been as effective as victories."

"Yet I see not our matters as so desprit, Ant'ney," remonstrated Poston. "Doubtless my Lord Rawdon is withdrawing a little for the present, but when his reinforcements reach him he will occupy his posts again. But ye speak of hedging—which I take to mean the currying of some sort of favor with the whigs—as something to be seized upon eagerly, as one might a hencoop for floatage if caught by a Saludy flood."

The paralytic abandoned his mocking air and spoke more seriously. "There is a flood, Saul," he warned, "and it floweth seaward carrying Rawdon with it. 'Twill overwhelm ye; so I counsel the seizure of floatage. Camden is gone—Ninety Six and Augusta must follow. One link in the chain is broken and 'twill no longer bind. Were I a tory, I'd gather my gear and move whilst I might in the direction of Charles Town."

"And what are ye, if not tory?" questioned the irregular in amazement.

"A burned out volcano!" answered the man on

the bed. "A ham-strung wolf! A broken-backed buffalo! Think ye that I am to be reckoned as among the men of war?"

"But Kate? Ain't she as thick as thieves with young Cap'n Maclae of the garrison? There should be a wedding there soon. And doth she not contract with Cruger for provisions? Ain't Kate a tory?"

"Mayhap; but first she's a woman and the whigs will take no account of a woman's politics. But 'tis no time to be speaking of weddings. There is a war; and I am on my back; and there's the plantation to be looked after."

"Better weddings than woodscolts," muttered Poston into his beard, but too low to be clearly heard.

"What said ye?" asked the invalid querulously.

"I said that one hungry and lacking bread might e'en steal a morsel," replied the other in the same tone.

"What? Bread? Are ye again a-hungered and so soon? Gad, if I but possessed your ability for the disposal of victuals!"

"I am not hungry—but I could manage with a bit more of drink."

"Or even your thirst! Man, ye remind me of a puncheon, so excellent is your capacity. . . . Amelie! A third glass for Poston! . . . Now then, what said ye?"

Poston shook his head. "Ye're a stubborn man, Ant'ney," he conceded. "If ye insist on a thing there's

no staying ye. I did but moralize briefly on the appetites, and noting my empty glass, wondered who'd fill it for me should I take your hard advice and creep away to Charles Town." He glanced slyly at the bed and calculated the effect of his explanation.

Anthony scowled. "Ye were always a liar, Saul," he said frankly, "and seem likely to keep in practice. D'ye think of naught but drink and belly-timber?"

"I think not even of those things when I can avoid it," returned Poston, not unwilling to divert the other, "but they are master hands at forcing themselves upon the attention. Thought is to be shunned. It cloudeth the senses and prejudiceth one's observation. And as for lying, your skilled liar modifieth and adorneth his conversation and thus promoteth pleasing intercourse—your naked truth being like a naked man, that is to say devilishly unattractive. Again, a good lie is, like the moon, easy to regard; but the bare truth resembleth the sun in that it blindeth and confuseth a man."

"I take it that your eyesight hath not been dimmed by such speculation," retorted Anthony dryly. "And from what I hear, ye'd do well to think sometimes of Andy Pickens who, as well as food and drink, hath a way of enforcing himself upon the attention."

"I do remember the cursed Presbyterian at times and consider that, if he stretcheth my neck, he may thus unduly lengthen the distance between my mouth

and my stomach. But for this thought, I had possibly remained to speak to him at Beattie's."

While this conversation was going forward at the farmhouse, Kate and her lover were keeping tryst under the great oak near the scene of their first meeting. It had been a chastened Maclae who had ridden into the town with his unwelcome news of the retirement from Camden. Hitherto he had shared the arrogance and cocksureness of his fellow officers. Now he was stunned by the perception of a possibility that the British arms were not as invincible as he had been taught to believe.

The young man, however, had a marked faculty for enjoying the present moment. Tomorrow, in his philosophy, might never come and yesterday was forever gone. The ordered security of the town, the humdrum round of daily duty, and the pleasant intoxication of his intercourse with Kate had soon dulled the edge of his chagrin and put to rest his gloomy forebodings. And Kate, although of a more self-reliant and determined character, also seemed, for the present, content to cast her bread of life aimlessly upon the waters.

Perhaps it was as well. There was little that either might do to alter the direction of that current of national events which was sweeping them onward. As for themselves, they were happy; and it is no small thing for a man and woman to achieve this even for a little while. Those who have won so much have taken a heavy tribute from life; and never there-

after can either life or death deny to such a palm of triumph.

In the months of their association, Kate had not failed gradually and indefinably to realize her superiority to Maclae in strength of will and definiteness of purpose. This discovery had bred no contempt in her but rather an added tenderness. Without formulating the matter, she sensed that her ability implied her responsibility—that it was her part to direct, to protect, even to save, if salvation became necessary. She gloried in this knowledge—she would have exchanged lovers with no woman on earth.

Maclae's affection was less altruistic. Indeed to the young New Yorker life and love meant primarily the indulgence of one's self and not the pleasuring of another. It is a conception that is not uncommon and the man who holds it seldom realizes his essential weakness. Maclae considered himself a strong and dominant person and felt that he condescended in a considerable degree when he sought the kisses of rustic Kate.

But the pair neither considered nor voiced such abstractions as they sat together beneath the oak. Indeed neither, at the moment, desired overmuch speech. The pressure of hand upon hand, the contact of seeking lips, the warmth of their touching bodies, each had a significance which words could but feebly convey. Of the two, however, the man, as the less deeply moved, was the more inclined to be loquacious.

"Sweet are thy kisses, dear," he murmured, drawing her yet closer.

She did not answer—only raised her head and lifting a hand pressed his cheek against her own.

"And thy lips are like pomegranates," he continued, "fresh and desirous—not sweetly cloying, but the keen begetters of deeper appetite."

"Hast great experience of lips?"

"A little of mine own and thine. Would that I had more of the like!"

"Ye are full diligent now in gaining more."

"More—yes—but not yet a sufficiency. With my lips on thine, I am beyond reach of misfortune. Feel ye not so?"

"Nay, not beyond reach of misfortune but defiant of all that misfortune may bring. I'd take your kiss gladly though pain lurked in it—or death. Know ye not, Hugh, that love is bitter-sweet; that it is too real to be complacent and placid; that 'tis a shield whose face is ecstasy and whose reverse is suffering?"

"Nay, my love," he remonstrated, "it seemeth not so to me."

She sighed. "No," she agreed, "it would not. . . . But I must go, Hugh. Amelie waiteth my coming."

"Nay, my darling! Let Amelie wait while I further ravish the roses of thy lips."

"D'ye not realize that I am a woman of affairs—that I have work to do?"

"Labor, by hands such as thine! 'Tis an insult to the gods!"

"Then must I insult the gods, even though I find the touch of thy lips sweet to my flesh. Good-bye."

"Nay, not yet!"

"Aye; but I must! Already I am bankrupt of leisure and expend my significant time."

It was late on the same evening that Amelie stood in her master's bedchamber in response to his summons.

"They are obsessed? Ever in each other's company?" Anthony queried.

The old woman grumbled an assent.

"I like it not. Yet Kate is like me—she doth not bear easily either curb or spur. All may be well. But when the King's men are gone and Maclae with them— What then? Is it like that he will leave the child behind to eat her heart out?"

The negress muttered in answer.

"What? Ye think so? . . . Ye may be right. Youth calleth to youth and will not be denied. Who am I—an old hulk on the ebb tide, a brand nigh consumed—to stand between my child and her happiness? I who, in my own time, held ever to my own course and grasped firmly that which I desired. No, I'll deny Kate nothing—only, I wish I were sure that 'tis for her happiness."

Amelie spoke again, this time at more length.

"Ah, you are sure. Well, ye may be right. I recall that yon thievish knave Poston did, some hours since and in my presence, mow and mutter words

that he dared not speak aloud to me. Yea, it is possible. . . . Amelie, the years hath dealt with ye more kindly than with me. Ye'll outlive me— Nay, I know. Cease interruption!—Ye owe me somewhat; but for me—"

The negress again broke in with rapid words and a lively pantomime.

"Ye recall it all? The moonlight on the town and the sea? Then ye recall your indebtedness and now I demand my dues. A life—yes, it runs so—a life for a life. If I and the devil quote scripture, indeed we do it for a purpose. . . . Yea, I have a purpose and it is this: That, through you, my hand—dead or helpless, it matters not—shall shield Kate, and if there be need for vengeance, avenge her; that even to the shedding of your own blood or the taking of the life of another, you will do this for me. For look ye, I like not to lie under obligation to any—neither for benefits nor for injuries. 'Tis a point of honor with me that I have never failed to discharge a debt—according to the hoary law—in the same coin with which 'twas incurred. . . . Ye'll see that my accounts are cleared, Amelie?"

The huge negress fixed her eyes on the broken figure of the speaker. Civilization had fallen from her, and in place of the slatternly plantation cook, there emerged a weird and implacable priestess of the jungle. Her gray wool seemed to rise and quiver and her jaws moved until she resembled a blood-hound licking its chops. Words followed—

uncouth words, which were scarcely understandable.

But Anthony Fowler understood and was satisfied. " 'Tis well," he answered, "and I'll sleep the better for't. I trust ye, Amelie! Mayhap, for all our doubts, the man's honest. But at best 'twill be she that gives and he that takes. Na'th'less, he may be honest. . . . I'll sleep now."

Several days after this conversation between Amelie and her master, Colonel John Cruger sat in his office in the village of Ninety Six and read and reread the dispatches which had just been handed him. As he considered the information which these letters had brought him, his brows were corrugated and his eyes were troubled. Presently he rapped on his table.

"Summon me the commissioned officers," he said to the orderly who answered his call.

When these, including Maclae, had arrived, he laid the dispatches before them. "Gentlemen," he commented, "ye will perceive from these papers that we, who are posted at Ninety Six, are to be severely tested. Greene hath already passed the Congarees on his way to beleaguer us, while Pickens, Clarke, and Lee have invested Augusta. The outcome appeareth to me hazardous, but we shall hold this post. Tomorrow work will be resumed on the stockades and ditches. To accomplish our purposes the more expeditiously, I shall direct that every able-bodied male slave in the neighborhood shall be pressed into

use and that all privately-owned spades and shovels shall be requisitioned. Gentlemen, with full confidence in your firmness and your zeal, I now dismiss ye."

As Maclae left the presence of his commander, he felt a sudden unlift of spirit. "Let them come," he apostrophized, "and let the gray gods cast the dice."

CHAPTER XI

THE tidings of Greene's approach caused consternation in the town and among the garrison. Amid all the forays and alarms that had agitated the country, Ninety Six had remained practically unthreatened and always in the secure possession of the royal armies. In the shadow of this town the tories had gathered and from its vicinity the whigs had fled, returning only as prisoners to be hanged. Order had reigned here and in no town in South Carolina—Charles Town not excepted—might one, thriftily minded, engage in his daily business in more perfect security. Now all this was threatened.

"Greene should have followed Rawdon," grumbled old Anthony, moved as much by his wish to remain undisturbed as by his perception of military strategy. "But the man lacks stark resolution and prefers the belaboring of his adversary's extremities to a bold stroke at the heart."

" 'Tis most annoying that he should come hither," assented Kate, affecting a calmness which she did not altogether feel. "Nevertheless, since he is coming, we have but to keep the peace and hold our peace. An we do this, I shall doubtless drive some traffic with him, if not in honest gold then in half-counterfeit, continental paper. Soldiers must

eat, be they British or American. Politics hath small connection with the appetite."

" 'Twill probably serve us equally to bestow our goods as to exchange them for the currency," growled the old man. "I am of those who trust in hard money and take no promises. A promise to pay means that I'll pay if 'tis impossible to avoid it. I know of no more prolific breeder of lies than a note of hand—be it given by an individual or by a government. . . . However, 'tis likely that presently we shall have little to offer. Since Cruger hath pressed the plough hands the plantation suffers, doth it not?"

"We miss our ploughmen," replied the girl simply. "The corn is grassy and the cattle daily need tendance. Still, I am using the women servants and so make a shift to keep our business going."

The old man scarcely heeded her, so intent was he on airing his grievances. "Three likely fellows," he went on, "all in their prime, who cost me a hundred and fifty pun' each in the Charles Town market. They're gone and not apt to be returned; trust your King's officer to know to a penny the worth of a slave. They have stolen many in the lower country and have shipped them away to the sugar islands and sold them. Confiscation, they call the transaction; but 'tis plain thieving—the King's treasury receiveth not a penny, I'll warrant."

"But Colonel Cruger is not of that character," urged Kate. "He is an honest gentleman, who when

this siege is over will return all three, Cæsar, Raz, and Dewberry, unharmed to their cabins."

"When this siege is over," objected her father, "Cruger may be—aye, is likely to be—Greene's prisoner, and then who will return me my blacks? Think ye there are no thieves among the whigs? I tell ye your partisans are scarcely less apt acquisitors than the Britons. Sumter, 'tis said, payeth off his men with the negroes and cattle he hath seized, using the grown stock for major sums and the children and calves for small change!"

Kate smiled. "'Tis not possible that the town will fall into such hands," she answered confidently.

"'Tis more than possible, 'tis probable," reiterated Anthony inexorably. "Given a close investment —the water supply is already precarious and in time the food must fail— Yes, the place will fall unless it is speedily relieved."

"Then it will be relieved."

"Whence? Camden is abandoned and Augusta beleaguered. Between this place and Charles Town the outlying bands roam unhindered. Who will relieve Ninety Six?"

"Why Lord Rawdon. Surely, marching from the city, he could brush all opposition aside and so—"

"Aye, he might. But will he? 'Tis a long, difficult march and Rawdon is none too well supplied with troops, they say."

"He must. He cannot leave faithful men to die disgraceful deaths whilst he—"

"Nay then, we shall see. But think ye, my girl, how little the life of one man, or of a hundred, may count in the plans of a commander-in-chief."

The old man turned his face to the window, and looking out into the road, continued his grumbling.

But although Anthony Fowler doubted the success of the defense of Ninety Six, Lieutenant-Colonel John Harris Cruger of De Lancey's Corps of New York Royalists allowed himself to entertain no such misgivings. His garrison, despite the fact that it was depleted by Rawdon's withdrawals, still consisted of three hundred and fifty regulars as good as the best in the British service, two hundred South Carolina loyalists well trained and battle tested, and the usual horde of semi-attached tory militia. The latter, usually worthless in regular operations and untrustworthy on a foray, would fight earnestly now because, if the post fell, each one of them stood in immediate danger of the gallows.

In addition to the troops, above a hundred negroes had been removed from the surrounding farms and herded into the town. These were of little or no use as active combatants, but were capable of rendering most excellent service on the fortifications and elsewhere when labor was needed. They had already completed the earthwork of the Star Redoubt and were now employed in constructing additional stockades and covered ways, the town itself being sur-

rounded by blockhouses connected by pickets and by a deep ditch. Thus prepared, Cruger awaited with some confidence the assaults of his enemies.

In order to establish touch with Greene's advance, the Colonel had dispatched Maclae, with Saul Poston and twenty mounted men, in the direction of the Congarees. Maclae halted his party at Cloud's Creek, made camp, and sent the scout forward in search of intelligence. One man, on foot and in the woods, could certainly venture where a mounted company could not.

While awaiting the return of Poston, Maclae departed from his ordinary habits and gave some consideration to his future. The military events of the last two months had been of a nature too disquieting to permit any one—even one journeying through life with no other purpose than enjoying a pleasant time on the way—to believe that the garrison at Ninety Six could pursue an unruffled existence. It had already been rumored, indeed, that it was the purpose of Lord Rawdon to evacuate both Ninety Six and Augusta. Certainly Greene's coming would make such a movement immediately impracticable, but it was entirely possible that such a decision might follow the American defeat—Maclae was too loyal to his flag to doubt that Greene would be defeated.

The young man saw clearly, therefore, that his pleasant love affair, which so far had seemed to drift idly on the sea of circumstance, would soon demand a clearer definition of its objective. Yet he

was as far as ever from being prepared to meet the issue. There was still his mother to be considered, as well as Bettina Van Clear. He knew that Bettina had no real claim on him—nothing more tangible than a stolen kiss and some gallant speeches—and that she lacked the intoxicating flavor of the gallant daughter of Anthony Fowler. But she had charms of her own—soft and alluring prettiness, mild sophistication, established position. Maclae could scarcely imagine Kate Fowler moving in that slightly cynical circle of New York society of which his mother and Bettina Van Clear constituted a part.

On the other hand, how could he forego Kate—the stolen meetings, the passionate kisses, the yielding abandon of her arms? Having never charted for himself a course independent of his mother's will he found himself impotent to do so now. Whenever he was in Kate's presence, it was the daughter of Anthony who decided and he who yielded. It might have been better for both of them if the young Captain had been strong of will even to do evil—if he had now been able to turn his back with cynic indifference on his late romantic episode. But he could not—he had tasted honey and he had found it sweet. He sighed, but he knew that he would continue to drift.

His reflections were ended by Poston's return. "Seen 'em, Cap'n," the tory reported briefly. "Yea, they're right on top of us. Likely they'll halt at Milligan's branch tonight."

"Of whom do ye speak? Greene's whole army or a scurvy parcel of raiders?"

"Greene's army—in full force. I watched 'em an hour as they filed by. They're outfitted for a siege —guns, waggins, and intrenchin' tools. A thousand strong, or maybe fifteen hundred."

"We'll go forward and inspect them."

"Caint say I'm over anxious for a closer acquaintance," remarked the guide.

"I've half a mind to beat up their pickets, ride into 'em, give 'em a volley, and then skedaddle."

" 'Tis too risky. Billy Washington's dragoons would presently chase ye from here to the post. That'd be excitin' but sca'cely creditable."

"I'm damned if I'll be chased by Washington."

"Then we must lie close. 'Tis better that we see them than that they observe us."

"But Cruger desires an accurate report."

"Leave the men here, look 'ee, and ride forrard with me. There's less chance of startin' somethin' we'd be onable to stop."

Maclae summoned his sergeant and gave him the necessary orders. This done, both the officer and Poston mounted and rode forward. The sun was just setting as they crossed the stream that bordered their encampment. By the time that the stars became visible the whole character of the country through which they were travelling had changed. The monumental oaks and pines which bordered the creek had been succeeded by a stunted growth of blackjack and

huckleberry while the reddish soil had given place to a fine white sand which cumbered the roadway and filled the open spaces in the scrubby undergrowth with snow-like drifts. This sand, while it hindered progress, did muffle the footsteps of the horses, so that the only sound that marked their passage was the heavy breathing of their beasts and the creaking of their saddleleather.

Travelling thus, they came at last to the crest of a great sandhill, whence the road dropped rapidly for a quarter of a mile down to the banks of a stream. Beyond the water another hill rose and cut the skyline. Half way up this slope there were the twinkling lights of many small fires and out of the semi-darkness there came the voices of men, the clanking of harness, the stamping of shod hooves. For a quarter of a mile the fires lay in a semicircle, shining like stars that had somehow fallen upon the shaggy breast of the incline.

For half an hour they watched intently this array of their enemies, then catching the sound of horsemen passing the ford, they turned and rode back to their own camp. Quite early the next morning Maclae fell back on Ninety Six. There was no alternative left him.

Two days later Greene's army, marching up the Charles Town road, came within sight of the post. Too weak to offer opposition in the open, Cruger crouched behind his fortifications and waited. Slowly and methodically, without haste and equally without

delay, the American forces encircled the British works. Then, when the investment was complete, they pitched their camps, planted their artillery, and began under the direction of Kosciusko, Greene's Polish engineer, to open trenches and parallels.

It was evident to Kosciusko from the first that the Star Redoubt was the key to the place. It dominated the stockades and blockhouses and overlooked the depression in which lay the rivulet whence the town drew its water. Toward this redoubt, therefore, the American engineer began a slow approach, first by parallels and a zigzag trench, and then by a mine; it being his purpose to blow up the earthwork with gunpowder.

But mining is tedious work; so Greene, in the meantime, pressed the siege along other lines. He built tall towers of logs and from these elevated platforms his riflemen endeavored to command the interior of the redoubt but Cruger countered by heightening his parapets with layers of sandbags. The device of the towers having failed, the Americans attempted to burn the town with firearrows, only to fail again; for the British commander promptly tore the inflammable roofs from all buildings which were in reach of such missiles. Finally under cover of night, a sergeant and eight men were sent to set the stockade itself alight but being discovered by the loyalists they were repulsed with loss. Kosciusko's mine, however, was being steadily advanced toward the redoubt.

Cruger knew from the surface indications that his opponents were mining. Indeed, he began a countermine but with small hope of success. He was a courageous officer and a skilful one—was too well versed in the art of war, in fact, to fail to perceive that unless relief came Ninety Six must presently be taken. Already the American trenches were, at some points, less than a hundred yards distant from his own. And he was sealed in—no tidings from Rawdon had reached him.

Was Rawdon marching? This was the question that every man in the garrison was asking. Could he march? His Lordship's forces had been regarded as no more than sufficient to cover Charles Town properly. There came no answer.

Then one day there was a sound of rejoicing in the American camp. From the parapets of the town the British lookouts beheld the cause. Pickens had arrived to augment with his partisans the strength of the besiegers. The newcomers brought with them a train of captured wagons, artillery, and prisoners. Augusta had fallen and Ninety Six stood alone, the one post in all the hill country which still held out for the King. How long could Ninety Six endure? Was Lord Rawdon coming? Cruger walked the floor of his headquarters in an excess of anxiety. It was vitally necessary to get a message through to Rawdon.

The next week opened with an easterly rain. The

days were gloomy and the nights stygian. Cruger sent for Poston.

"You know our condition?" he said to the tory.

"Yea, a child could understand it," answered the woodsman. "It seems that we wait, like fat hogs in a pen, the stroke of the butcher."

Cruger scowled. "Think you so?" he inquired. "Nay, 'tis not so hopeless. . . . But they press us hard. . . . I must send news to Rawdon. They threaten our access to the spring and the brook. Our covered ways no longer protect us. If we fail of water—"

"There is still a way to draw out water from the brook," replied the irregular.

"How then?"

"Those coal black niggers of Fowler's. Strip 'em naked and send 'em to the brook under cover of darkness."

Cruger's face lighted with a smile. "By heaven, 'tis an ingenious stratagem!" he declared. "I may yet have occasion to use it. But as long as the rain lasts—"

"There's no lack of water today," agreed the tory. "In fact I have a surfeit of it. 'Tis a drizzle of dreariness and I walk in it like a lost angel in a ruined paradise."

" 'Tis a friendly rain."

"How so, Colonel?"

"For one thing, it supplies us with drink."

"Saul doth not greatly esteem water either as a beverage or as a detergent," laughed Maclae who had come in and was listening.

"In truth water is somewhat waterish and lacketh authority within a man," agreed the irregular. "Within or without, it chilleth the courage and is apt to gripe the bowels. No man fights well when he hath the bellyache, as Gates found out at Sanders Creek."

"But, as rain, it obscures vision—" began Cruger.

"Not so greatly as doth Poston's rum," interjected Maclae with a laugh.

"Nay," objected the tory. "Good rum enhanceth the vision. Look ye, when I am sober I see one moon; when drunk two. Say ye not that I see twice as well when drunk?"

"But not twice as truly," objected the Captain.

Poston appeared to consider. "Who knoweth," he asked finally, "whether there be two moons in the sky or one?"

"In vino veritas—perhaps?" rejoined Maclae not unwilling to exhibit before his colonel some evidence of his reading.

But Cruger's brow was still furrowed and he accorded small notice to the jesting.

" 'Tis no laughing matter that I am broaching to Poston," he remarked reprovingly. "Our position here becomes untenable. A messenger must pass the American lines and seek assistance from Lord Rawdon. I have chosen Poston for the task and now

charge him with it. The fate of the post hangs on his success."

"And failing success, I hang," ventured the irregular.

"Doubtless," replied the Colonel. "But what will a few days more or less matter? You are a man marked by the whigs and if I surrender you will as surely hang. I offer a desperate chance to a man who would be desperate had he the wit to comprehend his danger."

Poston raised a hand and caressed his throat. "Nay, the Covenanter's rope'll not tighten on my goozle," he asserted with emphasis. "Make ready your dispatches and furnish me with some pieces of gold. I'll be moving afore midnight."

As he turned away, Maclae followed him outside. "Surely, Saul," he remarked, "you will never adventure straight south on the Charles Town road? To do so would invite capture within the first half mile."

"Nay, I'm not such a fool. I'll make for the Saludy. Beyond that I'll fetch a wide circuit and strike for Orangeburg. And, mark ye, Captain, once I'm across yonder parapet, there be no better whig than I. To bamboozle the first sentry, is all I ask."

"So I thought. But if ye go north to the Saluda, you'll pass Fowler's farm. Think ye that you could deliver a letter to Kate without endangering your errand?"

" 'Tis easy enough an I win through."

"But can you win through? Man, 'tis a desperate venture!"

"Needs must when the devil drives. I came out from Beattie's mill, and you with me."

"So you did. Yea, ye are skilled. . . . But see ye here, pouch this broad piece and come by my quarters as ye go to Cruger for the dispatches."

"Ye'll then have your letter ready?"

"Yes, and more gold."

"Nay, keep your gold. I'll rook Cruger for a sufficiency."

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS nearing midnight and the slow, sullen rain was still falling when Saul Poston stepped from the door of Cruger's headquarters. The street was dark save for a momentary gleam where a door opened and closed. Even the tavern, where ordinarily mirth and jollity reigned until the small hours of the morning, was silent and apparently deserted. The good days of careless wassail were gone. The enemy was at the gate and an hour of bloody reckoning seemed very close at hand.

Poston turned up the collar of his coat and made sure of his only weapon, a long straight knife. Neither rifle nor pistol could be of great use on a night like this and either might prove a hindrance. But a knife was secret, silent, and deadly—he caressed the blade thoughtfully.

Pulling his cap closer over his eyes, he made his way cautiously toward the redoubt. It was not well to advertise one's self—there were those in the garrison, no doubt, who would willingly purchase immunity for themselves at the price of the life of another. He slid through the darkness furtively, avoiding the more frequented ways.

The redoubt faced north, was nearly a half mile from the main gate of the town, and was probably

the last place along the lines whence one would seek an exit. The principal camp of the Americans lay directly in front of it. Having reached the earthwork, the woodsman sought the officer of the guard and handed him a token.

"Follow me," commanded the officer, leading the way toward the parapet. "Grimes," he continued, apparently addressing the darkness, "he comes!"

The sentinel, who had been previously warned, had a little blaze below the firestep but Poston avoided the light of it. While the officer conferred with the sentinel, the adventurer hoisted himself to the top of the embankment and lay flat, listening. There was no sound other than the steady drip of the rain and the whispers of the officer. In the distance were the fires of the American camp—small fires shining mistily through the murky night.

With infinite care the irregular began to let himself down from the parapet into the outside ditch. It was uncertain work, an inch at a time with no knowledge of what might await in the space of the next inch. Finally he stood at the bottom.

The ascent toward the outer world was even more difficult. On that side the deep excavation was almost perpendicular. Wet by the rain, the raw, red earth was as slippery as soap. There was not a weed or a bush upon which to lay hold. With his hands he scrabbled out niches for his feet, then other niches for his fingers. Slowly and painfully he mounted, little by little. At the end of ten minutes he gained

the lip of the trench, drew himself out, and again lay flat, breathing hard.

For a time he remained motionless, regaining his breath and listening. Again he made sure of his knife, which might easily have been lost during his recent passage. Finally he moved forward, flat on his belly like a snake. Presently he stopped again. The rain fell monotonously, a sighing wind moaned in the bushes, the leaden heavens seemed approaching the earth. He crawled on—seemingly for an eternity.

Then he heard a footstep. At the sound, he flattened himself. The footsteps passed him. He recognized the slow, perfunctory tread of a sentinel. Further on there was the subdued glow of a picket fire.

He waited until the sentry was some yards away, then rose to his feet. Crouching low, he moved swiftly and noiselessly forward and gained the shelter of a dripping bush. Here he dropped again and waited.

He heard the sentry pass and repass and knew that he was safely beyond the man's beat. He skirted the bush and moved on, treading lightly and guiding himself by the gleam of the fire. He had almost succeeded in avoiding the picket post when he stepped upon a stick which snapped sharply.

"Who's there!" some one challenged with authority.

"Jones, of Pickens's melishy," answered Poston without hesitation.

"The devil, you say! Why can't you damned militiamen stay at your proper posts? D'ye know that you are almost beyond the sentry lines?" questioned the challenger wrathfully, for there were few endearments exchanged between the continentals and the militia.

It seemed to Poston necessary to sustain his assumed character. "I know I'm a nigh either a polecat or a reg'lar," he answered hardily, "but I caint tell—they smell summat alike. I come here a huntin' some dry wood."

"And you expected to find it here? Let me impress it on you, you son of Solomon and expert on polecats, that there's nothing dry tonight on this picket line except my gullet. Come in here to the fire and let us have a look at you."

With an air of nonchalance, Poston obeyed. The firelight revealed him as a sorry sight. His clothing was bedraggled and plastered with mud until it was scarcely recognizable as clothing. The officer who had challenged him scanned him narrowly.

"Gad!" he remarked. " 'Tis hard to distinguish whether you be livestock or realty. There's half a farm on ye. How got you yourself into such a mess?"

Poston motioned in the general direction in which he believed the mine to lie. "I fell into the damned ditch that leads to yon hole," he explained. " 'Tis keen for shelter you continentals be. On my affidavy,

ye burrow like groundhogs. Could ye spare me a sup o' rum?"

The officer made a gesture of negation. "Had I a sup," he replied, "I should have supped it long ago. Rum maketh itself as scarce here as do the militia in a battle. Not a drop of grog has been served in two days."

The irregular stooped, secured a stick, and with it began to scrape the mire from his clothing. "Yet there is drink to be had," he remarked insinuatingly. "Yea, had I time and the wherewithal, I could fetch ye a bottle of prime Jamaica. It lieth not three mile away."

"Rum, at so great a distance, comforteth me no whit," retorted the other.

"Neither doth it warm my innards," replied Poston," although I long more powerfully to kiss a bottle than doth a lad to buss a maid. My hide is spongy with the wet and I crave that which will drive the water outward."

"Your craving becometh you. I knew not that a militiaman had so much in common with his betters."

"For a broad piece, I'd fetch ye the liquor," whined Poston.

The officer laughed sardonically and turned to his sergeant. "Examine me closely, Giles," he requested ironically, "and see if I be grown feebleminded. The knave here assumeth it. He desires that I entrust

him with money with which he is to vanish in the darkness on an errand to purchase rum. Egad, either he is a simpleton, or I am!"

"Ye are the simpleton," replied the woodsman imperturbably. "And since ye are so, ye're likely to remain dry. I spoke from a desire to serve ye, nor considered at first that being in the continentals, ye must have had much experience of thievishness and onreliability."

"It will be well," bridled the sergeant, "to hold this fellow until morning and hale him before the provost."

Poston seated himself comfortably. "Have it as ye will," he said. "If ye desire to hear, on the morrow, the Ruling Elder recite the catechism to ye for detainin' one of his men, 'tis naught to me."

"Who the dickens is the Ruling Elder?"

"Ginerl Pickens—a man who can quote Scripture so hard ye'd think he was swearin' at ye."

"Ye were bred hereabouts then. Pickens's followers are mainly from this section."

"Yea, I know the country, and the places where rum is to be had. Nor need ye have feared that I'd pouch your money and not come back. Ye could have sent a man with me. . . . Yea, and if ye lacked gold, I mout make a shift with the currency although it is not so certain in procurement." He shifted his position and warmed his back at the fire.

The officer and his sergeant conferred apart. It was evident that the promise of rum held a certain

lure for them. Presently they approached Poston again.

"You're sure of the liquor?"

Poston nodded.

"And will take a man of ours with you?"

Poston nodded again.

"Better send two men," advised the sergeant. "'Tis a slippery customer we have here."

"Ye can all come if ye're a mind to," suggested Poston generously.

The sergeant laughed. "I'll go with him myself," he offered. "He can't trick me."

"Take the money then. Hold on to that and the rum, when ye get it. No militiaman will leave either behind him."

"Aye, what of the man? Shall I fetch him back?"

"He'll fetch himself back as long as you let him smell the rum and not taste it."

The sergeant affixed his bayonet to his musket. "Now then, Jones," he commanded, "get a-going ahead of me and mind where you lead me."

"It's powerful dark. What if I fall in another hole?" queried the irregular.

"'Twon't make ye any muddier. March!"

They set out, Poston leading the way with intentional clumsiness. He headed straight for the fires of the central encampment.

"Not that way, you oaf," warned his companion. "In there the headquarters guard will halt and question us. Bear to your left."

Poston altered his direction. The wind had risen higher and was begining to tear the clouds apart. The rain had slackened, and here and there in the sky the stars appeared and disappeared. After a time they cleared the encampment and presently stumbled into the road to the river which led by Fowler's.

A keen temptation now beset the tory. He was out of the town, through the American lines, and into the woods—woods which were as familiar to him as were the streets of Ninety Six. It would be child's play, in such surroundings, to elude the lumbering sergeant or even to murder him. The irregular knew all this but he held his hand, He had his own standards, albeit he was neither inexperienced in slaughter nor honest. After all, it was by means of this sergeant that he had attained safety.

With the consciousness that he, and not his guard, was now master of the situation, his spirits rose. He looked over his shoulder. "Take your baggonet away from my back and come up alongside," he said to the sergeant. "Had I cared to lose ye, I could have done so anywhere for a half mile back."

"Had ye tried it, I'd ha' loosed a bullet into you," threatened the continental, abandoning his pose of compulsion nevertheless.

"Ye'd have loosed a bullet, I don't doubt," commented Poston, "but when ye loosed it I'd likely have been elsewhere than you considered me to be."

"Brag's a good dog," the other reminded him.

"'Tis a poor dog that'll not wag his own tail. But when we reach yon house, there's some danger. We come oninvited, and there's a gal there that swings a careless fowling piece. Besides, Ant'ney aint no lamb."

The sergeant answered doubtfully. He felt vaguely that the other was treating him as one to be disregarded and he resented it.

"Ye mean that ye're desirous of leaving me—"

"Not without kissin' ye good-bye," replied Poston nonchalantly. "I mean that for a short season ye shall endure the pain of my absence—or, if ye choose to put the matter baldly, that ye shall wait aside whilst I rouse the house. Your officer would lose all regard for me should I send ye back with your hide full of swanshot."

The continental considered the matter suspiciously but perceived no safe alternative. He distrusted the irregular, but if the rum was to be had it seemed necessary to allow the man a certain latitude. Accordingly he submitted to the necessity of waiting in a fence corner while Poston approached the dwelling.

"Hello, the house!" called the latter vociferously after he had reached a point half way between the gate and the veranda.

For a tense moment there was silence, then the roaring voice of Anthony broke forth. "I have ye covered from the window," it said. "On your peril, stand as ye are!"

Poston held up his empty hands. "'Tis I—Poston!" he proclaimed lustily. "I would speak with you, Ant'ney."

"You damned knave!" roared the invalid. "What hours are these, that ye should—"

Then the voice of Kate broke in. She was soothing him. "Hush!" she whispered, when he was at last quieted. "Do you not realize 'tis a message from the garrison."

"More likely 'tis a scoundrel fleeing his duty and seeking harborage," grumbled the old man.

But the girl was already in the hall and had unbarred the heavy door. "Quick, Saul! Inside!" she commanded.

He needed no second bidding. With a lithe step he slid into the passageway. "Rum, Kate!" he ejaculated. "A bottle of it. 'Tis needed desperately."

She surveyed him by the light of the candle that she held in her hand. "Ye look it," she observed sarcastically.

He held up a hand deprecatingly. "Nay, you mistake. 'Tis not for myself. There is one—"

She caught her breath in quick apprehension. She was not unfamiliar with the straits of the garrison. Her excited imagination pictured Poston and Maclae seeking egress—a chase—a shot—a wounded man hidden by his companion who had come running for aid.

"Wait! Oh wait!" she whispered and vanished like a flitting ghost toward the rear of the house.

In a moment she was back, hooded and shawled, with the bottle of rum in her hand. "Tell me now," she gasped.

"Nay," Poston exclaimed in amazement. "'Tis not as you think, Mistress Kate. No, not at all!"

"What?" she cried, sinking into a chair and trembling with relief.

"Nay, I ran the lines alone. I've a letter for ye. The traitors took me but they esteem me a whig. I promised to obtain rum for them—there's one of them without. The rum is the price of my liberty—and of the letter."

She thrust the bottle into his hands. "The letter?" she inquired.

"I'll return as soon as I've dismissed the fellow."

"The letter?"

"Aye, here 'tis. Shut the door behind me."

The sergeant, grown impatient, was entering the yard when Poston met him with the bottle. "Rat me! But I thought ye had given me the slip," he remarked with relief in his voice.

"The thing was so childish easy that I disdained its performance," explained the irregular. "Doubtless ye would have wept had ye found me missing and I cannot abear a man's weeping."

The other man snorted. "'Twas not in my mind that ye had gone," he averred untruthfully. "I feared rather to find you making love to the rum bottle."

"Such a sweetheart hath a flavored kiss, I do con-

fess," returned Poston, "and is much to be preferred to indifferent company. Na'th'less I am a man of my word."

"Come, let us be going."

" 'Tis kindly thus to solicit me, but daylight approaches and my reputation, while good, might not abide the shock of being caught in your company."

"Ye will return to the camp," replied the other doggedly. "Think ye I did not hear ye called Poston, not Jones?"

"In the militia," explained Poston with exaggerated carefulness, "strange as it may appear to a continental, a man hath often two names—the one which his mother giveth him and another which he inheriteth from his father. A continental, 'tis said, often hath no inherited name. Na'th'less, having legal parentage, I am called Poston Jones. So hand me the money and take the rum. And, look ye, be careful that the liquor seduce ye not by the way. I am an honest man and it concerneth me that the officer receive full measure."

"To the devil with your names. It seemeth to me my duty to return you to your commander."

"Friend," said Poston with affected earnestness, "be advised of me and make your way to your own place as swiftly as may be, thanking God that ye are permitted so much. Should ye go with me to Pickens, he'd likely spreadeagle both of us—you for leaving your post and me for keeping bawdy company. Bethink ye, too, what may happen if ye linger

here and be taken, in the morning, outside the limits of the camp. Aye, be warned and get ye gone."

Realizing the weakness of his position and somewhat bemused by so much eloquence, the sergeant parted with the money that he carried and received the bottle of rum. Then, still half undecided, he turned and walked slowly away. Poston watched the retreating form until he could no longer discern it. Finally he drew a long breath and reëntered the house.

Kate met him.

"Ye have conned the letter? Ye are informed?" he inquired.

The girl nodded. "What is it that you require?" she asked in an undertone.

"Rations and a horse."

"Poston! Poston!" called Anthony.

The girl hurried away and the woodsman turned into the old man's bedchamber.

"Aye, Ant'ney."

"What's afoot?"

Rapidly Poston sketched the conditions in the town, the necessity for relief and his own adventures.

"Ye're a smooth, eel-like knave," commented the invalid. "But for what purpose did ye spare the sergeant?"

The tory glanced knowingly at his interlocutor. "Look ye," he replied, "I ride hence to Orangeburg and I may be taken. Can ye not see the valley, in

such case, of a sergeant of continentals who could swear that I had been harboring in the whig camp and not in the town?"

"Ye're a soapy rogue," reiterated Anthony. "I doubt me if you'll ever be hanged, albeit ye deserve it."

The girl returned bringing a cloak and provisions in a little bag—cornpone, bacon, and more rum. "The roan horse is in the farther stable," she said, "and saddle-gear in the harness shed."

Poston left the house and made his way into the barnyard. He had just passed the gate of the enclosure when he was seized from behind, thrown heavily to the ground, and had the point of a knife pricking his throat. Over him there hung a great, shapeless body that muttered hoarsely.

"Poston!" he hissed at the shape. " 'Tis Poston! —Amelie, you she-devil, hold your hand!"

Slowly her powerful grasp was relaxed and he rose. As he did so, she sprang away from him and stood on guard. Again she muttered a menace.

Poston shook himself. "Some day you'll do murder, my beauty," he prophesied. " 'Tis horrible enough to be slain, but to be slain by you—ugh! Surely ye trod delicately to come upon me like that. . . . But sheathe your knife and step within the house. Mistress Kate will inform ye that I am no intruder and that I walk your yards on legitimate errands. Pshaw, Amelie, I'm ashamed of ye! Begone!"

The woman listened to his semi-soliloquy without replying. When he ceased speaking she moved away toward the house, while he resumed his passage to the stables. Presently he secured the horse, but before leaving the stall he scooped out a hiding place beneath a sill and hid his gold. British gold might prove damning; besides, he could depend on his wits, and the currency he carried, to supply his necessities.

He led the horse out, saddled it, mounted, and took the road, riding northward toward the river. There was no more rain. The torn clouds were drifting away and the roadway was walled by the dark forms of the dripping trees. After three miles of progress, he descended a hill and saw before him the yellow water of the flowing stream.

The rain was too recent to affect the ford. He rode into the river and, following the shoal water around a broad curve, emerged on the other side. Having climbed the steep bank, he ascended a slope and checked his horse at the crest.

It was already morning. In the east the sun was rising. Behind him the long, narrow valley was filled to the brim with fog, while ahead lay the open road. Presently he spoke to his horse and went on.

CHAPTER XIII

SINCE the beginning of the siege of the town, the inhabitants of Fowler's farm had remained more or less secluded. The requisition by Colonel Cruger of the male slaves for service in the garrison had added heavily to the burdens of the women on the plantation, for it was the peak of the growing season—a time when the crops must be cultivated if a harvest was to be expected. Even as matters stood Kate had been forced to abandon to the overrunning grass much that had already been planted.

Thriftily, the girl husbanded her remaining resources. Although her field crops lacked promise and her herds had been depleted by the British in assembling provisions anticipatory to the siege, there remained to her the humbler products of the vegetable garden, the poultry yard, and the dairy. With the permission of the American commander she had already turned these to account and had established an active traffic with the besiegers. After a winter of subsistence on salt pork, molasses, and corn meal, the soldiers welcomed enthusiastically any who could supply them with butter, eggs, and green stuff.

On the morning following Poston's departure, she saddled her horse, and with a basket of such comestibles on her arm, rode into the American lines. The

rain of the night before was over. The earth, newly washed, seemed to smile in the sunshine, and cardinals and mockingbirds flashed their wings in the thickets. Toward the town, however, the green sod was scarred by the raw, red trenches and at some distance from these a sort of village had sprung up —a rude assemblage of tattered tents, brush arbors, and every form of hutment that the ingenuity of man could devise. Occasionally, as she approached, a rifle cracked and once the heavier detonation of a fieldpiece hushed for a moment the casual conversation of the company streets.

Kate Fowler's mount sniffed at the smell of the powder and trod daintily the muddy paths between the huts. From their shelters, men long denied the society of women stared at her and exchanged muttered words. A few, bolder than the others, uttered comments and witticisms with the evident intention of having their remarks overheard. Others, more alimentative than procreative, eyed her basket speculatively and searched their pockets in the vain hope that while they slept some benevolent saint had deposited therein the price of a dozen eggs or of a pat of butter.

Kate gave as small heed to this commonality—this rabble of the army—this expendible material of war—as she did to the pawing and bellowing of the beef-cattle which had been assembled for their sustenance. Her thoughts were really with Maclae. As she rode, she sought with a questing eye the battle-

ments, the stockades, and the unroofed houses of the beleaguered fortress and imagined, with a small, cold catch at her heart, the possibility that he was sad, or hungry, or hurt. She desired to see him that she might reassure herself. She longed that he might appear, if only for a moment, on the distant parapet; then shuddered at her own wish, lest her desire should come to pass and her lover fall dead in her very sight—the target of some lurking rifleman.

She made her way onward toward the front and finally stopped before a rather pretentious cabin which evidently antedated the siege. This the Continental officers had found unoccupied and had converted for their comfort and pleasure into a combined club and mess-hall. She was greeted with cheerfulness by a young officer who, having spent a wet night on picket and having lacked the solace of rum until near morning, now lounged, stimulated and dried, on the rude piazza of the building. She smiled at him, for she recognized him as one with whom she had previously transacted business.

"Ah Mistress Kate," he exclaimed, "truly is't said that 'Sorrow endureth for a night but joy cometh in the morning.' . . . Riley, thou lazy bag-pudding, wait on Mistress Kate."

The mess-cook came out and took the basket.

"I look at ye and I fall into a melancholy," continued the young man, "because 'tis whispered that one, mine enemy, hath forestalled me in your regard.

Therefore I suspect that ye have come, this bright summer morning, to spy us out in our poverty—to see with your own eyes how an ungrateful Congress doth supply its defenders with bad straw, bad shoes, and bad bread."

"I have come," answered the girl simply, "to supply, so far as I am able, your lack if ye have any. As to your melancholy, it doth not yet appear to me that ye need divine aid to digest your dinner."

"Whatever ye bring," he assured her, "whether sustenance for our bodies or the sight of your beauty to our avid eyes, is welcomed."

The girl smiled indulgently. "I know soldiers," she chided. "They be ever more prompt of speech than sincere in admiration."

"Ah, ye believe me not," he charged with an exaggerated air of dismay.

"At my house," replied the girl archly, "there is an old woman who, lest I lack the wit to walk righteously, hath always advised me to trust in God and believe nobody."

"Yea, but look ye; will she so advise you after she hath made acquaintance with me?"

"Her indifference toward ye would be akin to that of the Most High."

"What? D'ye consider the Host High indifferent to me?"

"I sh'd think that ye'd wish him so. Do ye not fear to attract his attention?"

"I beg a truce. I lack a theological mind."

"Godamercy! What an unnecessary word—theological!"

During this persiflage the cook had emptied the basket and now returned it, together with the reckoning in currency. She took the money and counted it. "You said—" she reminded the officer.

The other rose. "I said that 'tis well for your traffic that I have a stomach, and I have at least a half a mind—" He started toward her with the imp of mischief peering out from his eyes.

But she turned her horse skilfully. "Nay, sit in the sun and meditate until ye recover the whole of it," she laughed as she rode away.

Meanwhile Poston, being now north of the Saluda, was pushing his horse steadily toward the Broad. He was a weary man but his mission admitted no delay. He had marked for his stopping place during the coming night a certain rude tavern or ordinary which he knew to stand on the banks of the latter stream some ten miles above the junction of the rivers. He travelled openly and with little fear of interruption, since the partisan bands of this region were now gathered about Ninety Six, while any individual outlyers not so occupied were probably at this season busy tilling their little farms. With any chance-met, single individual, the tory did not doubt his ability to cope, preferably by the use of his wits but if necessary in a physical encounter.

It was nearing sunset when he drew rein in front

of the primitive hostelry and called: "Ho, the house!"

A greasy individual, rotund, exhibiting a Levantine nose and a loose, mobile mouth, answered his summons. "Light! Light!" he invited unctuously. "Dere's refreshment for man and beast and de rates are reasonable. Vill you stable de horse or graze him in de canebottom?"

Poston dismounted thankfully, since he had been on the move for more than eighteen hours. "I'll stable, Swag-belly," he replied with an assumption of vast superiority, "and I'll see to the animal myself. 'Tis only after my mount hath been fed and bedded that I may wash my throat with a sup of Jamaican liquor." He knew something of rustic innkeepers and their lax care for the beasts of travellers, and realized that the strength of his horse was an asset to be husbanded.

"You shall lack nodings an your purse be nodt costive," growled the host coming forward and taking the horse by the bridle. "Dis vay." He moved toward a log barn in the rear of the house. "You been travel a long distance, maybe?"

"From the Tumbling Shoals on the edge of the Injun country," lied Poston. "All day I've rid hard and I've come to your place. 'Tis as if I had rid through the universe seeking Heaven and had found Hell at the end of the road."

The innkeeper made little sucking sounds with his tongue and his teeth. "Vat vould ye?" he inquired.

"Travelling be none so pleasant as shaking de sheets of a maiden's bed." Then he lowered his voice to a confidential pitch and leered knowingly. "Vich side?" he asked.

"Both sides, or none an ye choose," replied the irregular unblushingly. "I ha' no great choice a-tween a blue smock and a red petticoat."

"How vas dat?"

"'Tis my nature, in any strife, to stand aside and see fair play. What is the King to me? Or Congress? Think ye that either hath a care for me? An I should die, would either come to my funeral? Why then should I scrape my hide in the service of either?"

"But have ye not been forced to bear arms at one time or another?"

"Yea, I have been solicited with some show of compulsion, but, look ye, I have fits—rolling, foaming, gnashing fits. D'ye desire to see me in one?" And the tory rolled his eyes and convulsed the muscles of his face.

The other man started backward with his hands raised avertingly. "No, no, no," he objected. "I am of a believing turn o' mind; I'll take your word for't."

"Did ye desire it, I'd pleasure ye," leered Poston. "I am as fecund of fits as a shad is of eggs. But how is it that you, yourself, do not serve on either side?"

The other caught his hands beneath his pendulous

stomach. "I am of too great a corporosity," he explained. "My feet will not a bear my weight."

Poston laughed. He knew that the man purchased his immunity by acting as spy and informer to both parties—that he changed from King to Congress and from Congress to King as seemed expedient. But he was truly too old and unwieldy to perform the duties of a soldier.

"Ye have a stomach eh?" the irregular jested. "But no stomach for fighting? Well y'are something too fat for marching—when ye walk your buttocks shake like a quagmire."

"My flesh is mine own," growled the other.

"Well, God be praised for that—I'd not rob ye of it!"

During the conversation they had installed the horse in the barn. Now they rubbed the animal dry and supplied it generously with corn and fodder. This done, they made their way back to the house where a smell of frying meat announced that supper was being prepared. As they entered the common room, Poston perceived that he had been preceded there by two others. These sat at a table and had a bottle and cards between them.

"Give ye good evenin'," said the tory as he removed his cap.

The two glanced at him appraisingly, while he, in like manner, gave them his earnest attention. One was slight of figure, nervous, and of an ape-like cast

of countenance; the other was stockily built moon-faced, and bearded like a goat. On the face of each the Almighty had written indelibly the word "knave." Each replied surlily to Poston's greeting.

It was Poston's humor to continue to assume a high hand. He had assessed the company and knew that presently the pair would attempt to override him. He also knew that nothing so disconcerts a bully as a dose of his own medicine. He shoved a chair up to the unoccupied end of the table and seated himself.

"Ho, some drink!" he roared truculently.

The pair, interrupted in their cardplaying, eyed him with awakened interest and curiosity. The landlord, somewhat at a loss to understand his guest, spread his hands deprecatingly.

"I haf viskey—no rum," he answered hastily.

" 'Twill serve! 'Twill serve!" assented the tory roughly and impatiently. "Though 'tis a rascally liquor—a raw, scraping, rasping potion, ill-flavored, and little agreeable to the chitterlings of a gentleman."

The bearded man lifted a sarcastic glance to the speaker's mud-encrusted clothing. "Be ye a gentleman?" he inquired scornfully.

Poston endured the look hardily and returned it with interest.

"Be ye?" he retorted with a sneer. "If ye claim so much, then may I never again walk into the presence of respectability!"

The bearded one dropped his cards on the table. "I claim nought nor make pretensions," he answered. "But I can slit a weasand with the best," he added significantly.

The landlord had arrived with a glass of white, potent spirit. The irregular took the glass, sipped, coughed, and set it aside. "Or throw a card, perhaps," he suggested to his interlocutor.

"Yea, or throw a card."

"Care ye to evidence your skill?"

"In slitting or carding?"

"I doubt not that ye can use a knife indifferent well—in the dark. 'Twas in my mind to try ye with the pasteboards. . . . Still, 'tis with you. I see ye boast no great skill; and 'tis but a waste of lather to shave an ass."

"Having heard your commentary, I'll try ye on the text," retorted the other as he gathered the cards into his hands. "Stay out of this, Drewry, while I cut me this cockerel's comb."

The cards were dealt and the game began. Poston, having succeeded in angering his opponent, played coolly, warily, and not altogether honestly. There are many tricks, and other odds and ends of the devil's suggesting, that one may acquire while loitering in an idle garrison.

The bearded man lost the first game and the second. At the third deal he won, and on the fourth lost what he had won. At the end of an hour he had borrowed his companion's purse. This supply availed

him nothing. Presently he threw his cards forcibly on the table.

"I can play no more," he announced sullenly.

The smaller man, he who had been called Drewry, had been watching the play with the excited eyes of a born gambler. Now he caught the cards up from the table and rose facing Poston.

"All, or quits!" he demanded.

"Well?" queried the tory sardonically.

"I'll bet ye," he cried, pulling at his belt, "I'll bet ye my pistol against the money ye've won that I can cut the ace of spades in one pass at the deck." As he finished speaking, he threw the weapon he had mentioned on the table.

Carelessly Poston picked the pistol up and turned it over in his hand. " 'Tis a pretty toy," he remarked drawlingly. "Ye—ah—bought it, no doubt, from some British officer. An I won it, I'd be feared to display it least I be taken for a thief."

"Drat your mouthing," exclaimed the other. "Will ye wager or will ye not?"

"I am to shuffle the cards?" asked Poston quietly.

"Aye, to be sure," answered the other, winking surreptitiously but confidently at his companion.

Poston placed the money that he had won—a handful of dirty currency, a little copper and silver, and a piece of gold—in a heap beside the pistol. The landlord, attracted by the unusual nature of the wager, came and looked on; and even the kitchen wench, a blowsy, red-cheeked woman whose stained

bodice gapingly exposed her fleshy breasts, joined the company.

Poston took the cards from the other man's hand, shuffled them with some care, and slapped them down on the table. "Cut!" he said and waited.

For a moment there was no sound save the breathing of those who stood by. Then Drewry laughed.

"Fair's fair," he exclaimed, "and a cut's a cut. See ye to't." And with an air of victory he whipped a knife from his belt, turned the deck on edge, and with a single stroke of his blade severed the whole pack of cards into two halves. "The ace of spades is cut," he announced decisively, and began to gather up the money.

For a brief moment the astonishment of the little audience bred silence. Then the landlord drew his breath sharply.

" 'Twas a slick trick," he commented.

Then Poston spoke. "Fair's fair and a cut's a cut," he repeated. "But where is the ace of spades. 'Tis for you to show it me."

Drewry caught up one half of the severed deck and his companion the other. They ran the fragments rapidly through their fingers. Then they searched again more carefully. Finally the landlord reconstructed the entire pack piece by piece. The ace of spades was missing.

"A cut's a cut," observed Poston quietly, "and ye didn't cut it." With that he pushed Drewry's hand aside, picked up the pistol, and pouched the money.

"Ye're a damned sharper!" exploded the bearded one. "Y'r fingers hath the trick of attraction!"

Poston smiled and dropped his hand carelessly to the haft of his knife. The two gave him black looks, swore, conferred together apart, and finally left the house.

"I'll sup now," said the tory, as the door closed after them.

The woman served him at the table where he sat with bread, bacon, milk and butter. After he had finished eating, his host plucked him confidentially on the shoulder.

"They mean ye no good," the fat worthy whispered, wagging a head toward the doorway.

"Yea, doubtless in their hands I sh'd die of a sore throat," agreed the tory carelessly. "But hark ye! On second thought, I'll not trouble ye for a bed. I'll to your fodder loft and rest me there."

The other demurred, since the bed was available and he did not care to lose the price of it. It was a reflection on his house, he feared, that a traveller should prefer his stable to his beds. He assured Poston that the beds were excellent, the linen on them had been changed no longer than the week before.

These arguments furnished the tory with an additional reason for adhering to his decision. But perceiving that a valid excuse would be of service, he drew the innkeeper aside with the air of one imparting a secret.

"I be summat lousy," he confided. " 'Tis only that I'd not infect ye."

The other no longer opposed the transfer of his guest to the fodder loft.

Poston drank the whiskey which he had earlier set aside; then emerged cautiously from the house. He was aware of the character of his late fellow guests and recognized the possibility of their paying him a nocturnal visit. Many of their kind harbored along the main-travelled roads and fleeced or robbed unwary folk. The tory was taking no chances.

But his reconnoissance yielded no result. Everything in the neighborhood bespoke quietness and peace, except that there was a crack in the kitchen door through which the woman peered expectantly. He walked away from the house and across the road. At the end of a quarter of a mile he came to a pine thicket. He entered this, spread his cloak on the pine needles, and soon fell asleep.

It was two o'clock in the morning when he awoke. He arose, stretched himself, and rubbed the stiffness out of his limbs. Presently he made his way back to the barn, saddled his horse, and led it forth cautiously.

At the river crossing he found a flatboat and a skiff. He ferried his horse over, taking the precaution of towing the skiff behind the larger boat. Once across the river he tied the boats securely, trusting that, in case of pursuit, it would take the ferryman

an hour to recover them. In a few moments he was on his way with an open road before him.

A day later, at Orangeburg, he encountered Lord Rawdon, who was already marching to the relief of Cruger.

CHAPTER XIV

LORD RAWDON'S rise in the British army had been rapid. Coming to Boston, under Gage, in the beginning of the Revolution, he had participated in all the principal operations of the war in the north, had been present at the siege of Charles Town, and following the surrender of that city, had been placed in command of a division of the King's forces in South Carolina. Then, after Cornwallis left the province, he had succeeded to the chief command in this immediate section.

Harassed by many problems not of his own devising, with his health seriously menaced by the malarial climate of the lower country, and being compelled by the activities of the partisans to contract his lines and thus to abandon much of the territory which had heretofore been considered as won, he was already contemplating resigning and returning to England when the news reached him that Greene was attacking at Ninety Six. Being already seriously reduced in men and material, Rawdon would probably have been compelled to abandon Cruger to his fate had it not been for a fortunate accident. Just at the critical moment, however, there arrived in Charles Town harbor a fleet of troopships bearing three fresh regiments of Irish infantry which were

being sent forward from England to New York. Rawdon promptly seized upon these reinforcements, landed them, and marched.

These new troops, on the other hand, fresh from a long ocean voyage and unused to the semi-tropical heat of the Carolina lowlands, were not in the best condition for an exacting campaign. Also the column was hampered by the artillery and wagon trains. As a consequence the advance of the royal army was slow and tedious. At the end of a week the British were no further west than Orangeburg, where Poston found them.

Already anxious, since nothing during more than a fortnight had been heard from Cruger, Rawdon welcomed the tory and seized upon the dispatch. A perusal of Cruger's letter, however, failed to lessen his Lordship's concern, nor was the information which he extracted verbally from the messenger more reassuring. Indeed, Rawdon's yellowed countenance seemed yellower still as he sat beside a flaring, guttering candle in the village pothouse and questioned Poston.

"A mine, you say, and a scarcity of water?"

"Both, my lord."

"How far hath the mining advanced?"

"I cannot tell certainly, sir. I estimate that it will be two weeks ere they burrow beneath the parapet. But nothing is certain. I passed near the rathole but 'twas in darkness. Besides I was stupid at the time.

Ye see, I had met a young officer who was on picket duty and had exchanged ideas with him."

Rawdon frowned—he was in no mood for jesting. But the open face of Major Marjoribanks, who was present, paid the irregular the compliment of a smile.

"If Greene is in command, the operation will be slow," commented the Major. "The American commander is ever deliberate in his movements."

"It may be so," replied his lordship. "But the water supply?"

"A well is dug and under cover of night the negroes may still reach the rivulet. Also there hath been some storage of rainwater."

Rawdon wrinkled his brows and looked at Poston intently. "What think you?" he queried. "Have we yet time?"

The irregular bethought him of the exhausted men and animals that he had observed as he rode into the village and answered cautiously. "Ye have the time, sir, but I doubt me if ye have the speed."

" 'Tis true enough," commented Major Marjoribanks. "We move at a snail's pace."

"And yet as fast as we are able," added the commander gloomily. "Cruger asks aid within a week. 'Twill be a fortnight before we can reach him."

"Doubtless he will find means to gain further time if he knows that we are well on the way," suggested Marjoribanks hopefully.

"If he knows. That is the difficulty. Greene will be advised of our progress and will fiddle to the tune of it. But Cruger will remain in ignorance."

"Why not advise Colonel Cruger of our near approach. He is a resolute officer and I am sure that he will devise the means of holding the post until we can reach him."

"But how to advise him? That is the question?"

Marjoribanks waved a hand toward Poston, who had remained deferentially silent during the conversation between the officers. "The man who came out can best find the way in again," he suggested.

Rawdon turned to the irregular. "Will you undertake the task?" he asked curtly.

Poston shook his head. "A trapped coon, once he is free, doth not again thrust his foot in the snare," he replied with earnestness.

Rawdon clapped his purse on the table. "Gold may breed zeal," he said in an aside to Marjoribanks. Then he addressed himself again to Poston. "Ten broad pieces, my man, if you undertake my mission; ten more if you succeed in it."

Poston looked at the money longingly but shook his head a second time. "The weight of the gold in my pockets, sir," he objected, "would but enhance the effectiveness of the hangman's rope."

"What? Afraid? A soldier of the king afraid?"

"Nay, not to say afeared exactly; but in a state of sin wherefore I need more time for repentance than Greene will likely allow me."

"I do not ask you to meet Greene but to avoid him."

"In passing through the American camp I learned that their invitations to tarry there are sometimes pressing."

Rawdon moved his hands impatiently. "You magnify the danger," he said, "and my need is great. The wit that led you through yonder camp will surely serve you again. I raise my offer to twenty pieces down. Think on it, man. Is it not worth some slight adventure to possess the sum?" He lifted the purse so that the gold gleamed through the meshes.

The irregular eyed the money thoughtfully and remembered that other gold which he had so carefully hidden in the stable at Fowler's. "Hard money," he remarked contemplatively, "is something certain in an uncertain world."

"It is," agreed Rawdon, "and like most things that are certain, it is not easily come by."

The woodsman hesitated. It seemed to him impossible to make his way back into the garrison. Yet who could say that a chance opening might not offer. . . . And in case of success, could not Cruger be mulcted for an additional sum? . . . Even if later—after he had pocketed Rawdon's pieces—he simply vanished, could Lord Rawdon spare the time to chase a recreant messenger through the woods and swamps of upper Carolina? The British cause was waning; the tories must presently make such terms and seek such security as they might. Portable property, convert-

ible property, gold, all such seemed to Poston things necessary and desirable at all times and indispensable in the coming crisis. Suddenly he thrust forth his hand.

"Give me the gold and I'll essay the journey," he agreed. "In troublous times a man must take the world as it is. But I warn ye, the venture is no safe one. You risk your money and I my neck."

"The plan is the best that we can devise," replied Rawdon, handing him the purse. "Sup, sleep, and make ready. The dispatch will await you. And remember—if you are forced to destroy the paper, tell Cruger what you have seen—that the whole army is marching to his relief. You may go—God speed you on your mission!"

Poston scratched his head. "God?" he mused. "All of us pray to Him and no one of us doeth His will."

Three days after this interview with Rawdon, the irregular again approached the Saluda. He drew near the river lacking the confidence which had marked his leaving it. Then he had felt the exuberance of one escaping capture and a possible halter; now he was undertaking a risk for which he could find, in his own mind, no justification. There were those in the American lines who had cause to remember him. His capture was almost certain, and even if he attained the town, who could say that Cruger would not be forced to surrender before Rawdon could arrive?

As he crossed the river, he conned the matter from

every angle. Did King George lose his sleep because, in the woods of North America, one Saul Poston adventured desperately in his behalf? Not so; but just the same, Saul Poston was quite likely to lose his life in the King's behalf—or at least in behalf of the King's portrait on certain yellow pieces. The exchange seemed unequal, and like a shrewd bargainer, the tory decided that he would not make it. It seemed to him preferable that Cruger's scout and Dunlap's guide, now that the whigs were in the ascendant, should quietly disappear.

After he had passed the river, he abandoned the highway and took to the forest trails, and following these he approached the rear of the barnyard at Fowler's farm. Aware of the necessity for caution, he had hidden the horse in a ravine and now went forward on foot. As silently as an Indian, he crept out of the woods, and under cover of the fences, reconnoitered the premises.

Nothing sinister revealed itself. The road was empty, the house quiet, and the red sunset was bringing the slave women home from the fields. In the distance a partridge was calling; overhead the nighthawks swooped and circled. He stretched himself behind the sheltering fence at full length on the ground, and waited.

After a time Kate appeared. She saw to it that her few remaining cattle were penned and that her horses were fed. Presently she dismissed her helpers and they went away to their cabins. Poston began to

whistle softly an air that resembled, as well as whistling may, "God Save the King."

The girl lifted her head and listened. Then she looked about carefully to ascertain if the coast was clear. Perceiving no one, she faced in the direction of the whistling and beckoned.

Poston arose. "Here I am," he announced.

Kate's countenance, which had been alight with expectation, fell. For a second a wild hope that Maclae had—but that was over now.

"Ye failed to go," she charged accusingly.

"Nay," replied the tory, "I have delivered the letter and am returned."

"So soon? And what news bring ye?"

"Rawdon is coming."

"Yea, but when? They are in sore straits yonder. Day by day they yield some portion of the works. Only the redoubt is intact, and the Pole drives a mine under that. That which is to help must be quickly done."

" 'Twill be two weeks, Mistress Kate."

"Oh, too slow! The discouragement of the garrison is evident from the outside. I doubt me if they will hold so long. Did ye acquaint his lordship with the need for haste? Does he know all? Did ye speak of the mine?"

"Aye, he knows—and is distressed. But his troops are new and soft, and the roads are bad. He hath charged me with a letter and a message—"

"Good! 'Twill hearten them. 'Twill stouten their hearts. Yea, your news will insure their resistance to the utmost."

"But my news lacketh conveyance. How is Cruger to divine that an army marcheth to his relief?"

"Why—why— Go ye not in to the garrison then?"

"In what manner shall I accomplish that? Think ye 'twould hearten yon garrison to see me hanged in sight of their parapet? Will the stretching of my neck inform Colonel Cruger that Rawdon's troops are stretching their legs in this direction? Even if this were so, I am a man of sin and am loath to be cut off unshriven."

"Nay, Saul, ye mean it not. Ye'll outwit them. Ye'll make a safe passage. And then the post will stand until the siege be raised."

Poston shook his head. "Ye are concerned for Maclae," he charged, "and for his sake, ye are willing to see me dance on air—to view me supported by my neck instead of by my feet—to behold me perish for lack of footage—"

She flicked him with the whiplash of her anger. "I know ye for a thief," she flashed out scornfully, "but I ha' not, heretofore, deemed ye a coward!"

He shuffled uneasily and endeavored to mollify her wrath. "Nay, not a true thief, Mistress Kate," he remonstrated, "though I may have in my need picked up an unconsidered trifle or two. And no cow-

ard neither—'tis only that I am reverent, that I am not so ill mannered as to wish to enter unbidden and hastily into the presence of my Maker."

She tossed her head angrily. "Ye speak truly," she rapped out, "when ye say that I am concerned for Captain Maclae. I'd give my life for his and I care not who knows it. And he lieth yonder endangered while you—you would entertain me, meanwhile, with your paltry jesting! Give me the dispatch—I'll see 'tis conveyed, or will convey it!"

"The horse is yonder in the woods," said Poston, in a vain endeavor to divert her thoughts to other matters. "I'll bring him hither and stable him."

"The horse? What care I for horses now? Give me the letter, you fool! The letter, I tell ye!—and begone!"

He handed her Rawdon's dispatch, and stood regarding her as she hurried away. "Women are quare reasoners," he muttered. "I be a coward, since I am not in love with Captain Maclae."

Early the next morning, Kate Fowler filled her marketing basket and rode, as usual, into the American camp. Thriftily pushing her traffic, she had become a familiar figure there, and now, for the most part, passed with only that regard which men always accord a beautiful woman. Affecting the utmost sang froid this morning, offering her wares, exchanging saucy repartee, guiding her restive animal with the careless ease of a practised hand, she made her way gradually to the very front trenches. Fortunately for

her purpose, the military operation, into which she had thrust herself, was a siege and not a battle. The front was quiet except for an occasional shot.

She continued her progress through the lines until she reached the great road that led from the town toward Charles Town. Here the principal gateway to the British fortifications was faced, from the American side, by a breastwork of earth and logs. Behind the breastwork there was posted on this morning a lieutenant, whom she recognized as an acquaintance, together with a guard of a dozen men. As she approached this vital point, the girl's wit became more mordant, her smile more provoking.

"Egad, 'tis Mistress Kate Fowler," exclaimed the young officer in some confusion, since her appearance was both welcome and unexpected.

"What d'ye lack?" laughed she. "Eggs? Butter? Poultry?"

"Alas, we lack everything and are allowed nothing while on this post. Until we are relieved we are compelled to subsist on an anchorite's fare."

"I sh'd think it possible, even here, to spread butter on bread and to roast eggs. Yet I make no doubt that ye despise such simple fare, preferring your cook's sauces and entrees."

"Sauces and entrees, indeed," scoffed the young man lightly. "Yon Riley, may the devil take him, would scorch water, were such a thing possible. But in the presence of beauty we forget all that."

"Bullet is a beautiful horse," replied she with in-

tention, stooping to stroke the neck of her mount.

The officer shook his head. "Ye are clever but not wise," he commented. "Why divert the compliment from yourself to your horse?"

"Because the horse, more than I, is accustomed to dealing with lush verdancy."

"Nay, if I seem young and verdant, it is because of your presence. Lacking you, I approach the sere, brown hues of a blighted autumn."

The impatient horse had been curvetting and edging himself nearer the barrier. Now he backed away from it, almost upsetting one of the guard and leaving the space between himself and the obstacle clear.

"Ah, ye're most obliging—and sometimes intelligent!" she retorted.

At the same moment, the horse reared. Apparently frightened and, a more remarkable thing in so accomplished a horsewoman, almost losing her seat, the girl dropped her basket. The officer and two or three of the men had dropped everything and were springing to her aid, when in a flash the scene had changed.

Kate rose in her stirrup. "Now, Bullet! Now!" she cried and almost drew the blood from the side of the horse with the thrust of her rowelled spur.

The tall horse sprang as if propelled from a catapult. In one frightful bound, he cleared the barrier, and in the next moment his flying hoofs drummed a loud rataplan on the hardened clay of the road. And

the girl, bending low in her saddle, continued to urge: "Now, Bullet! Now! Now!"

For a long moment the guard stood staring—uncertain, uncomprehending, confused, at a loss. The officer was the first to recover.

"God help me!" he cried. "Fire! Fire, I say!" Then he covered his eyes with his hand.

In the meantime the girl had torn the dispatch from her bosom and was waving it over her head. "Dispatches!" she was screaming. "Open! Open, in the name of the King!"

At last a shot rang out; then another, and another. But they were hasty shots and went wild. No man's hand is steady when he trains his gunsight on a woman.

The great gate of the fort swung open. The British, now manning the parapet, answered the guard, volley for volley. Clamor, shouts, cries, and curses filled the air. And the girl, riding like a centaur, half turned in her saddle, waved her hand in a gay salute, and sped through the sallyport into the fortress.

The Lieutenant followed her with his eyes. "A brave ride," he muttered, "for which I'll probably be cashiered!"

CHAPTER XV

THE afternoon drew to a close at Fowler's farm. The sun, drowned in its own red light, sank below the horizon. The sky flushed, then paled, then darkened. The negresses, coming in from their major labors, began the small round of their evening tasks. But Mistress Kate, for the first time in the range of their memories, failed to appear in the barnyard.

The simple slavewomen marvelled at this for a little time, but soon their mercurial minds shifted focus and they began to gossip concerning old Amelie. As the trusted house servant, not subject as they were to labor in the fields, she was the usual object of their petty envyings and calumnies. The old woman was an exotic in a commonplace environment. To be different is a sufficient cause for hatred; and to be reputed a witch engenders fear. The two emotions beget mankind's intensest interest.

"She go lak dis," said one, imitating the old woman's swift and noiseless shuffle, "and as she go, her jaws dribble."

"No wonder she go lak dat an' her jaws dribble," commented another. "Ever' night she tu'n herse'f into a she-wolf an' roam de woods."

"Do she? I ain't s'prise—I been hear she howl!

She Affikin enty? an' she come here f'm a n'island, she say."

"She hatter come. She de daughter o' de devil an' a witch 'oman—dat howcome she a witch herse'f. No n'island kin abide her. Dat n'island hit spewed her up an' spit her out!"

"De devil her daddy?"

"Yeh. Don't you see how ever' time she spill water on de groun' hit foam up an' bile lak de heat of hell on'neath hit?"

"Do hit? I ain't notice."

"Nex' time, you look."

"I gwineter look."

"I lay dat when you looks, you'll be a-gwine instidder a-comin'," interpolated a third woman. "Effen you see any of de devil's works, you'll see 'em over yo' shoulder whilst you is a leavin' dar."

The other laughed hysterically, being wrought upon by her own imaginings. "Ain't it so?" she answered.

"Whar'bouts Miss Kate?"

"God knows!"

"I know He know; but who else know?"

"Ole 'Melie, maybe."

"I aint gwine ax her no more'n I'd ax God."

"God don't ha' no dealin's wiv 'Melie."

"You say de devil her daddy an' a black 'oman her mammy?"

"Who you talkin' 'bout?"

"Melie."

"Yeh, I say dat. 'Tis de trute, 'oman!"

"Is de devil a black man?"

"Yeh. How in de name o' God do he live in all dat fire an' not be black? Ain't de back o' yo' chimbley black?"

"How you know him den from 'nudder black man?" The questioner gave a little shudder that was born half of fear and half of a sort of delicious anticipation. A woman is never wholly afraid of the devil when he comes in the form of a man.

"You feel he head when he come. Effen he got horn, he de devil."

"You been feelin' anybody head?"

"Hush nigger!"

"I been feel Cæsar head. I ain't find no horn."

"Cæsar ain't no devil."

"I dunno. Some time he ack lak he kin to de devil."

"Cæsar jest a blue-gum, double-j'inted nigger."

"I ain't 'spute dat."

In the meantime Amelie went about her duties and wondered also at the absence of her mistress. The old woman was simpler than she seemed and at the same time was more complex. She was primarily a complete savage but her original nature had been overlaid by a double veneer from two alien cultures; nevertheless, under any stress of passion, the fundamental material was apt to appear. She had been a mature woman at the time that she was taken from the Cameroons in a slave ship. Four years in the

canefields of the French sugar islands, had modified her speech but in other respects had scarcely altered her. A longer sojourn in the Carolina backwoods, under a master who had more confidence in his own strength than in that of the law, had merely added an odd twist to her customs and habits of speech.

The other negroes at Fowler's were of Virginia stock. Their forbears had been in contact with white men for more than a hundred years. Their moral inheritance from their native forbears was more vague and tenuous. It is small wonder that they regarded Amelie, with her uncanny knowledge of woodslore, plants and poisons, with her indifferent outlook on life and death, with her primitive conceptions of right and wrong, as unnatural and uncanny—in short, as a witch.

Amelie's consciousness was burdened by no sense of remorse because, in Hayti, she had poisoned her master. She seldom thought of the incident, and when she did so, her regret was not for the deed but because of its unskilful performance and its consequent detection. Daily men administered death to animals, and in Amelie's mind, man was no more than another animal.

Therefore death, even her own death, appeared to her not at all the uncanny thing that it is to civilized man—it was simply a natural process like eating and drinking and sleeping. When one became weary, one slept; and when life became too difficult, one died—and in dying, gave to one's enemies the least possible

satisfaction. Therefore, in Hayti, she would have drowned herself rather than suffer at the hands of the executioner.

There, Anthony Fowler had rescued her from the sea. She neither applauded his interference nor resented it. The choice had been his own and she accepted life at his hands as she would have accepted death—as a matter of course. She suffered from no delusions about the matter. That which he had preserved was his to dispose of as he pleased—nothing could alter that not even the gratitude which she did not feel. Why should she feel grateful? Since the choice had been Anthony's, was not the obligation also his?

Essentially Amelie was a moral woman and a strong woman. Her morality was not concerned with sex—sex was to her merely an appetite; like hunger, a manifestation of the flesh rather than of the spirit—nor was her strength given to the upholding of standards which she could not understand. But to her own code, she was loyal—the code that had been taught her in a land where the sluggish rivers creep through the marshes and mangroves to lose themselves in the tropic sea.

In the course of the passing years, however, and in some queer fashion, love for Kate had possessed her, together with a certain admiration and adoration for Anthony. In the one case, a thwarted mother-love had found in the child a vicarious outlet; in the other the stark, half-savage resolution and

courage of the man found an answering echo in the breast of the wholly savage woman. And tonight the girl had failed to come home. In a simple fact one often faces a simple but irretrievable tragedy.

From the beginning, Amelie had sensed this danger, and forbidden by Anthony to interfere, had stood by and noted its unhindered approach. Now the opportunity for action had passed. She made the invalid comfortable, brought him his supper, and stood before him with folded hands.

"Kate comes not?" he asked anxiously.

She answered him in her queer gibberish.

"Yea, I know. She'd not stay in the camp so late. . . . Cæsar! . . . Nay . . . I forgot! they've taken my men; and I am bedfast!"

Amelie thrust her hand into her bosom—her knife was there. She turned. "I go," she said gutturally.

It was past midnight when she returned. The candle in Anthony's room had burned low. The disordered bedding indicated the poor patience which the invalid had given to his waiting. His pistol, withdrawn from beneath the covering and lying beside him, bespoke the impotent wrath which had seethed in his brain. The cutlass which hung habitually from his bedhead, had been torn from its place. All his life, he had commanded—and now he waited!

He started at the sound of Amelie's familiar footsteps.

The old woman had not found it difficult to get news of Kate, for the American camp was buzzing

with the news of her exploit. Already the incident was receiving apocryphal explanations, emendations and additions. Some were asserting that Kate Fowler was really a man in woman's clothing; others that a headless horseman had ridden from the mine, dashed through the camp, and gained the fortress. To Amelie the whole matter was clear—she knew Kate.

Now she entered the room and stood before her master.

"Speak," he rumbled, fighting vainly for self control.

She told the story. As she proceeded a certain relief manifested itself in his face. Suddenly his countenance lighted with an unwilling pride.

"Anthony's daughter!" he chuckled. "Anthony's daughter!"

In the end, his face clouded again. "Maclae!" he muttered. "She hath gone, then, to Maclae. And the popinjay is not worth such sacrifice. Aye, he'll consume her and throw her away like the skin of an emptied shaddock. I know his kind."

Amelie spoke again.

"Aye," he agreed, "she can care for herself if she'd think of herself. But she will not—she loveth him and so will suffer for him."

The woman hissed a comment.

Anthony laughed grimly. "You speak truly," he answered. "We do not love him—you and I. And if he but stumble in that which is due her, then—" He broke off suddenly and lay gazing at his helpless

limbs. "Amelie!" Perhaps for the first time in his life a note of appeal had crept into his voice. "You will outlast me. . . . I charge ye, Amelie—"

The passion which had been damned behind the still lips of the uncouth woman broke forth in a rushing, obscene current. Her eyes glittered like those of a serpent and her gross features were convulsed. Anthony took a long breath and lay relaxed. "Ye will!" he muttered. "I know ye will!"

She grew quieter, arranged his bedding, extinguished the candle, and left him.

Kate Fowler, at this moment, was lying awake in her bed in the hostelry at Ninety Six. All day, the officers of the King's garrison had clustered about her. She was the heroine of the hour; she had brought the good news. Because of her, the common room of the inn, so long silent, was again ringing with jests and laughter. Because of her, men were pledging each other in full glasses. Because of her, the lights in Cruger's headquarters were still burning, while the Commandant and his engineer evolved new schemes for defense, now that they were certain that Rawdon was marching. Altogether, because of her and the message she had brought, it was a gala night in the garrison; for they who live by the sword and may die on the morrow are ever prone to take their pleasures swiftly.

Up to this juncture Kate had lived moment by moment and the exaltation of her spirit had sus-

tained her. She was a woman of action, and her sense of accomplishment had been satisfied. Also she was a woman, and the applause of brave men had been grateful to her.

But now, in bed in a guestroom of the ordinary, with the noise of revelry vibrant beneath her but herself no part of the tumult, with the thin moonlight streaming in at the window and the unfamiliar challenges of the sentries invading her quiet, it was inevitable that a reaction should come. Up to this time, her relations with Maclae had involved no inevitable break with her former life. The one thing had grown out of the other and had seemed altogether a part of it. Then, unexpectedly, she had been called on to choose and had chosen. Once she might have turned back, now there could be no reversion. Every human being under like circumstances views the past with a touch of homesickness.

Kate thought of her father, of Amelie, of the safe and familiar round of her daily duties. In the twinkling of an eye, all had become remote. This day, from morning until evening, had lengthened until it had spanned the gulf between two existences. The three miles between the town and her home were, in effect, three infinities. The parapets and the trenches of the fort had leaped in a moment to be heights insurmountable and grim depths not to be plumbed. Yesterday she had been a neutral, safe in either camp. Today she was a patriot in the eyes of Cruger and a spy in those of Greene. What she was

in the eyes of her father, she could imagine but could not utter.

Certainly there was no safety for her except beneath the British flag. That was why she was in this tavern. She brooded over her changed condition. It is possible that she wept.

It was not that she repented her action, but that she repented the necessity for it. She had dared everything for the sake of Maclae—she smiled as she recalled the tributes to her patriotism—and knew that she would so dare again if the occasion offered. But patriotism? It is seldom that decisive action is based on an abstract motive.

But she had been compelled to choose between her father and Maclae and she had chosen. It meant nothing to her that Maclae had not yet formally taken her to wife. Such technicalities were often postponed in the backwoods—the visits of the clergymen being infrequent and the urgency of youth being great—but the unions were none the less binding. Besides, she did not consider herself an angel. Indeed she did not wish to be an angel—there are so many more interesting things in life than a continual care for the state of one's plumage. Yet she cried a little.

By morning she had wiped her tears away. It is difficult to be sad in June, when one has youth and a handsome lover, and breakfast for two is waiting in the lower room of an ordinary. She went down to Maclae with a smile on her face and a jest on her

lips; and if she did feel a slight, pricking pain at her heart, no one was the wiser. She was a brave woman.

Quite unaware that she even had a cause for regret, taking her sacrifice in his behalf entirely as a matter of course and as a part of his rightful due, Maclae rose at her entrance, welcomed her gracefully and placed her chair—the excellence of his manners covering, for her at least, his lack of understanding. Outside the window, a mocking bird was singing. From the direction of the redoubt, a cannon roared, and then another.

The Americans were increasing in activity, for they also had learned of Rawdon's march. Indeed, it was not many hours later that Greene called his officers into council. A courier from Sumter had just arrived who revealed the fact that the British field army had left Orangeburg three days before. This being the case, Rawdon must be no more than forty miles away. Whatever there was to be done must be done quickly.

In the council the Commander-in-chief of the Americans, fair, ruddy, and slightly obese, called for Kosciusko's report.

The sallow Pole, competent, other-worldly, and ascetic, consulted his plans. "In two weeks the mine will be complete," he asserted.

But the two weeks were not to be had. In four days, at the farthest, Rawdon would arrive. Greene was inclined to abandon the siege. Pickens, since the

town was in his immediate territory and the garrison a thorn in the flesh of the whigs of the neighborhood, urged an assault. Lee seconded Pickens.

Finally Greene agreed to the assault. In consequence of this decision, which was as agreeable to the impetuous as it was distasteful to the cautious, the officers scattered to prepare their troops for the coming action. Their orders were to storm the redoubt at noon on the following day.

The American preparations did not escape the eyes of the indefatigable Cruger. The loyalist colonel did not purpose to be taken, now that succor was almost in sight. He was even grimly elated over the hostile activity. The stir in the other camp was additional evidence of Rawdon's approach and was a confession that the siege had failed. Cruger was determined that the attempt to storm should also fail. With Maclae acting as his adjutant, he set about making his dispositions.

Near to all this activity, Fowler's farm lay inactive. Its mistress gone, all the machinery of industry had fallen slack; while both Anthony and Amelie were too preoccupied to set it moving again. The slave women gossipped idly in front of their cabins; the brook sang a murmuring song as it tumbled over the stones; the partridges piped undisturbed in the deserted fields.

Anthony, since his first outburst, lay in somber silence on his bed. He resembled a gaunt, weathered image graven in stone. Only the set of his lips and

the gleam in his sunken eyes revealed that life remained in him.

In his service Amelie padded back and forth untiringly. Sometimes she scanned the road; at others she cast a questioning glance toward the barnyard. She was, at the same time, the invalid's servant and his watchdog.

Once he questioned her. "That knave Poston?"

She made a gesture indicative of her ignorance of the man's whereabouts.

He moved his head impatiently. "A base and crafty varlet," he muttered. "But 'twould be possible to use him now."

Ten miles away, Poston sat at his ease in the doorway of an otherwise deserted cabin. For him both the American and the British camps were now hostile and were therefore places to be avoided. Should Rawdon lay hands on him, he would be flogged; if Greene caught him he would be hanged. But such remote dangers weighed lightly upon his spirits.

He had chosen his retreat with care. The place was isolated and had been long abandoned. No road, other than a scarcely perceptible track through the forest, led to it. Near to the rear of the building there was a dense canebrake into which a threatened man might easily disappear. And, in some way, since parting with Kate, he had again obtained a rifle, a bullet pouch, and a powder horn. The one thing now

necessary to his comfort was to provision his temporary abode.

Being familiar with the vicinity, he was aware that there was a small mill situated some distance away. The miller, a lame man, was an acquaintance. Indeed, until the arrival of the American army, the man had been a tory; but under present conditions, Poston had no doubt that his miller had become a furious whig. But whatever the man's present politics, Poston credited him with too much wit to be talkative. Shouldering his rifle, the refugee set out for the mill in search of provisions.

It was growing dusk when he reached the place, and the miller was shutting up for the night. However, Poston experienced no difficulty in obtaining the corn meal and bacon which he sought. He had found his acquaintance still in such a state of painful uncertainty as to which would prove the winning side as to be willing to make friends among the adherents of either.

Darkness had fallen when, having gathered his provender into a pack, Poston began his return. Indeed he had deliberately calculated on this obscurity, since the gloom lessened the likelihood of embarassing chance encounters by the wayside. Even so, he avoided the travelled paths and made his way stealthily through the woods.

He had accomplished perhaps a third of his journey, when a faint beam of light, too low for a star, appeared shining through the trees. He halted and

considered the phenomenon. Presently curiosity overcame caution, and laying aside for the moment his rifle and provisions, he proceeded to stalk the illumination.

Noiselessly he crept from tree to tree. As he went, the light grew brighter and his progress more furtive. At length, on the bank of a tiny rivulet, he espied the fire. It was burning beneath a sheltering whiteoak and by its light he could discern the forms of a large man and a small one eating ashcake and broiled bacon. Between the two there was a bottle. Poston crept nearer—he speculated as to the possibility of an invitation to share the meal and the bottle. Then one of the men turned his head and the refugee's jaw fell with amazement. He beheld his acquaintance of the tavern by the Broad—the man was moon-faced and bearded.

For a moment Poston surveyed the scene. There was no mistaking the second man any more than there was the first. Undoubtedly Drewry and his partner had left the Broad and were now harboring on the Saluda.

Feeling no inclination to renew his acquaintance with this pair, Poston withdrew as silently as he had come. Recovering his property, he gave the campfire a wide berth and proceeded on his way.

"Buzzards!" he ejaculated as he went. "Two buzzards that follow the armies! Gad, how I hate a thief! May God make me honest—but not altogether so!"

CHAPTER XVI

AT sunrise the reveille sounded in the American camp, while from the Star Redoubt the British drums answered defiantly. Men rose from their sleep to fall, some of them in the next few hours, into an eternal slumber. The smoke mounted from the breakfast fires in thin, blue columns; and the slant sunlight shot, lance like, through the green tops of the trees. It was June in South Carolina; the Cherokee roses in every hedge showed white constellations that rivalled by day the patterns formed by the stars at night.

At eleven o'clock, the most expert riflemen of Greene's militia manned the Maham towers in order to cover with their rifle fire the assault that was soon to be launched. The third parallel of the approaches was also manned for an identical purpose. Thirty minutes later a cannon roared and before its echoes died away the storming columns moved at a quick-step into the trenches.

These columns were two in number and were composed of the Virginia and Maryland continentals, on the one hand, and of the infantry of Lee's Legion and Kirkwood's Delaware troops on the other. Both parties were provided with fascines and with hooks mounted on poles—the latter to be used in pulling

the sandbags down from the parapets. So equipped, they stood ready crouching like athletes in advance of a supreme effort.

Nor was Cruger idle. He had lined his parapet with bayonets and through loopholes in the sandbags sharpshooters, equally as expert as those of the Americans, thrust the muzzles of their ready pieces. There was none of the maneuvering characteristic of partisan warfare apparent. Each commander practically invited his opponent's attention to his next move. It seemed that the battle was to be fought in the British manner—that is to say that the result would be determined, not by brilliant tactics and fertility of invention, but by sheer courage and tenacity of purpose.

At exactly noon, a second gun crashed and the American columns leaped forward. The bellow of the gun loosed pandemonium. To the crackling of an incessant rifle fire, the measured reports of the cannon of both combatants lent a hoarse diapason. Men shouted; smoke enveloped the field; and the acrid smell of burned powder smote harshly into every nostril.

Out of the uproar on the one hand and into the battle-smoke on the other, the storming parties dashed. The British rifles swept them and the cannon fire cut lanes in their ranks. Men swore, men fell, and men died, but the survivors would not be denied. They plunged into the deep ditch of the redoubt and began, under a bitter crossfire, to dislodge the sand-

bags with hooked poles and to pile fascines. They lacked but a moment of scaling the parapet and having at their foes in the open where their superior numbers would tell.

But Maclae, from his station near the rampart, saw the impending danger and intuitively sensed a remedy. Throwing aside the rifle which he had been firing, he rushed up to Cruger.

"Give me thirty men," he begged. "I shall pass out at the sallyport and take them on the flank in the ditch."

"On both flanks!" answered the Colonel instantly perceiving the merit of the suggestion. "On both flanks!" he repeated excitedly. "You with thirty bayonets on the one hand and French with thirty on the other! 'Tis an inspiration, Maclae. They do not dream that at the moment of defeat we have courage to launch an offensive. Have at them! Haste ye to French with my order. Gad, there's no time to lose!"

The thing was done. At the double, with muskets at the trail, two detachments—one headed by Maclae and the other by Captain French—dashed out of the sallyport and down into the ditch. There they parted, taking opposite directions. The depth of the excavation shielded them from the aim of the riflemen. Thus they swept, right and left, around the fortification and struck, in the bottom of the narrow ditch the flanks of the American storming party.

This irruption of the British created a new battle. The Americans were driven together into a mass and

were under the disadvantage of a complete surprise. They were also beset anew from the parapet, for the defenders there, heartened by the hesitation of their assailants, poured a withering fire down into them and followed this by a shower of sticks, stones, hatchets, and every other available missile.

In the shock of the first impact against the enemy, Maclae was thrust to the right and rear of his leading file. Then the man in front went down and the young officer, leaping forward, passed his sword through the body of his immediate opponent, and found himself struggling in the midst of a hacking, hewing, bludgeoning, and shouting circle. He made play about him with his slender but effective weapon. One bayonet passed between his arm and his side, another tore the coat from his back as he turned and twisted and cut and thrust. And then, in his extremity, his own men broke through to his aid.

In the next moment a bugle from the American lines sounded the recall of their troops. Greene, perceiving the plight of his men, had ordered a prompt withdrawal. Before Maclae could clear the sweat and dust from his eyes, his recent adversaries were drawing back, slowly and sullenly, into their own lines. He was too greatly exhausted to notice that, high and triumphant above the din, the British bugles were also blowing. Dizzy with fatigue, he followed his men back into the sallyport. But the bugles blew —loud and sweet—and Cruger was awaiting him, hat in hand, when he stumbled up to report.

To the right of the main battle, Colonel Lee of the Americans had succeeded better. The stockade in front of the village having been but lightly manned, Lee's column had carried the advance works there and were on the point of entering the town itself when the failure at the redoubt caused these also to retire.

While the struggle was raging, Kate Fowler, with Bullet saddled at the door, had paced the floor of the ordinary. So much of caution, Cruger had ordered and Maclae had insisted on. To one of her temper, the rôle assigned her was a difficult one. She could have, more easily, stood on the parapet rifle in hand or have ridden Bullet up and down the lines as she cheered and heartened the men.

No sooner had the firing slackened than she was in the saddle. She perceived Lee's infantry in the act of withdrawing, and heard the huzzas of victory from the garrison in the redoubt. As she crossed the depression separating the two wings of the fortification, she met some dozens of the recently wounded making their way into the town. She accosted them and one—evidently a loyalist of the neighborhood—approached and answered her. He was scarcely more than a boy, and his head was bound with a stained and tattered handkerchief.

"Ye won—I can see that," she began, trying vainly to control the tremor in her voice. "But at what price? Who have fallen?"

The man leaned upon his rifle and adjusted the

bandage about his brow. On one side of his face a trickle of blood was drying.

" 'Twas a near thing yon," he answered. "They were gaining the parapet when we struck their flanks in the ditch."

"What losses had ye? Know ye a Captain named Maclae?"

"Yea, I know him. 'Twas he that led our party."

"He led ye? Is he hurt? Tell me!"

"He may be broken in wind from chasing the rebels—otherwise he is well enough. There were no officers damaged—save one, and he but a lieutenant. 'Tis we poorer folk, who, with our accustomed liberality, have given our lives in this action."

A realization of her selfishness swept over her. "Ah, you are hurt!" she exclaimed. "Can I aid ye? Are you in pain? Athirst?"

Now that she knew her lover to be safe, the weight on her spirits was lifted. Her relief sought expression. Her benevolence tended to overflow and expend itself upon the nearest object.

"I? Why I've but a crack on the noggin," he admitted. " 'Twill soon heal, I am not thin in the roofage. But—did ye speak of a drink, Mistress?"

"Yes. Oh yes; shall I fetch you some water?"

The soldier smiled. "I'll drink your health in any tipple ye choose," he offered, "provided it not be water."

She laughed merrily. "And yet, two days since," she reminded him, "water in this garrison was more

precious than wine. However, since ye are so apt in self-denial, get ye to the ordinary and say to Mistress Mathis that I sent ye. And take this— 'Twill purchase more grog than ye are able to carry.—The Captain Maclae, he bore himself well, ye say?"

"Excellently well, Mistress. I was with him in the ditch."

"Say you so?"

"Aye, he laid about him so lustily with his sword that ye'd scarce have taken him for a gentleman!"

"Indeed!—Well, get you gone, lad, to the ordinary and fuddle yourself if ye will. But remember, rum is no sovereign remedy for a green wound. For the present I'd advise ye to a lighter drink—say wine."

The soldier knuckled his forehead. "Your wine," he objected, "hath something wanton in it, but rum is a sober drink—a moral drink."

"As you will, but—get you gone." And she laughed again.

Despite her anxiety she did not see Maclae until the following morning when he came to breakfast with her. She noted his appearance closely but he bore no mark of the battle save, perhaps, a few bruises. He was powdered and pomaded and was taking the honors which his fellows had showered upon him with a becoming gravity. To her congratulations he responded deprecatingly.

"Ye make light of your own courage, Hugh," she told him. "I would that I had been there to see."

"Ye escaped a nauseous sight, my sweet. 'Twas not a pretty business, though 'twas necessary. Did I tell you that Cruger hath gazetted me?"

"Indeed he could do no less—did ye not save the day? But I did long to view the battle. 'Twas not a pretty sight, ye say. I know 'twas not; but am I one of your swooning women who can abear the sight of naught harsher than roseleaves?"

"We all bear witness to your resolution, my Kate. But for you and the news that ye brought—"

"Will there be a second battle, Hugh?"

"No. The man Greene hath not the stomach for't. Were Lee in command, then perhaps. But Greene is cautious, albeit full of the certainty of his own righteousness. I am curious to hear his account of this defeat. I imagine that 'twill be the same plaint that he uttered after Guilford and Hobkirk's. 'The militia failed me. I would have succeeded, if—and if—and if.' "

"Yet, on the whole, 'tis his cause and not ours that hath prospered."

"So much he owes to the militia that he blames. In their own way, the partisans are ever active, while he is much addicted to his so-called 'camps of repose' —No, sweetheart, there'll be no new battle. Greene will raise the siege. Now and then the Quakerism which he hath abjured comes uppermost in him and destroyeth his appetite for fighting. Besides Rawdon is nigh, and I apprehend that Greene had as soon

meet the devil in a dark lane as to encounter a British general at the head of his grenadiers."

"Abandoning the siege then, what think ye that Greene will do?"

"I take it that he will go where he should have gone at first—that is to say, to the Santee. Listen, Kate, I'll whisper ye a secret. The loss of Camden hath rendered this post untenable. Had Greene not attacked us, the garrison would be already withdrawn—Cruger hath said as much."

"But, Hugh, can the King thus abandon the poor folk who have trusted in his strength, adhered to his cause, and here placed themselves under his protection?"

"Kings, for the furtherance of their glories, often perform actions which, to the common man, seem abominable, nor do the fortunes of the ununiformed enter frequently into the calculations of a military commander. To abandon Ninety Six is a hard necessity, but what will ye? Augusta is fallen and Camden is given up, while all intermediate posts twixt this place and Orangeburg have fallen to our enemies."

"Yea, but the Americans do not garrison the posts they have taken."

"They are too shrewd to do so. They leave the traps open that more rats may enter; but once the stockades are remanned, they will fall upon them a second time. These woodsmen hold the forests and fight not save upon their own terms."

Kate's face had grown grave. "Then," she observed, "the abandonment of Ninety Six is clearly foreshadowed."

"The decision rests with Lord Rawdon, but it is impossible to see how he can determine otherwise."

"In that case I must journey far from my father, and he ill."

Maclae became visibly embarrassed. The problem to which she now alluded was already giving him some concern and he was aware that it admitted no facile solution. Since Kate had definitely cast her lot with the British garrison, he felt his own responsibility for her. On the other hand, previous to the investment of the post, further letters from his mother had most urgently pressed upon him the claims of Bettina Van Clear. Indeed he had received two rather saucy epistles from Bettina herself and had replied in terms which, at least, would justify in the young lady a state of lively expectancy.

Naturally Maclae had been pondering the final outcome of such an embarrassing entanglement. He preferred Kate to Bettina, to be sure, but he was by no means certain that he could explain her satisfactorily to his mother or succeed in introducing her into that established New York society of which the old lady was arbitress. Besides, as lovely as Kate undoubtedly was, he had become somewhat jaded with lovemaking, so that even his zest for beauty drowsed under the soporific of satiety.

As was usual with him in his dealings with women,

he temporized. "Doth it necessarily follow, my dear," he asked, "that you should abandon your father?"

"If you are ordered away, how may I, at the same time, be with both of you," she answered simply. "If you are mine, must I not follow you? I have not heard how my father regardeth me. And d'ye think that the whigs will soon forget that 'twas I who disarranged their plans?"

Maclae twisted uneasily in his chair. He had not wished to consider his attachment to Kate as a thing of permanence. It was a satisfying episode; an idyll to recall in the dull after days, when he had become a staid and respectable citizen in his native town; a solace for the drab years in which desire fails and a man nurses his imagination on the unsubstantial images of bygone caresses.

"I had not thought—" he hesitated. "Certainly you cannot remain here after the army has gone. I know that Cruger will see ye well cared for, and so too will Rawdon when he heareth what it is that you have accomplished."

"What of you, Hugh?"

"I? Oh yes; I, certainly—so far as it lieth in my power."

She flushed and then paled. "D'ye lack enthusiasm?" she asked coldly.

"No; certainly not, sweetheart. I am but concerned on your account—not my own."

"I pray ye that ye concern yourself no further. I

am neither child nor imbecile and am able to shift for myself."

"Nay, let us not quarrel."

"I do not quarrel. 'Tis only that you leave so much unsaid."

"You know that I love you."

"Whatever a silly, gullible maid may know, that I know. But do you know love; or do you mistake for't some other thing, pleasing perhaps but more transient?"

"I am well acquainted with love. I e'en know its name. I call it Kate." He caught her hand and would have kissed her but she drew away.

"Have a care," she warned. "Mistress Mathis hath keen eyes and her virtue is apt to be virulent."

The episode was checked by the appearance of other officers of the garrison who were also seeking breakfast. With all of these Maclae was acquainted and with some he was intimate. All recognized Kate, and having politely acknowledged her presence, they scattered about the room in search of seats. Three approached the particular table at which she and Maclae were seated.

"Ah," exclaimed one of the latter, "our friend Maclae hath preceded us, and sunneth early his young reputation in the smiles of our latest heroine."

"He who would sun any matter, Fullerton," laughed Maclae, "must rise before the sunrise—a habit which, I fear me, ye have not yet acquired."

"Maclae resembleth the fabled unicorn," scoffed

another of the party. "No sooner doth he perceive a virgin than he lieth down at her feet."

"What a beastly comparison," retorted Maclae, "and as fabulous as 'tis inhuman."

"Why complain, Maclae, when the gods so favor ye?" inquired Fullerton, returning to the charge. "Yesterday Mars crowned ye and today ye bask in the smiles of Venus."

One of those at another table nudged his companion. "The mixed company mix their metaphors," he sneered in an undertone. "Venus and virginity are not compatible."

The third officer turned to Kate. "A share of your smiles, Mistress," he demanded.

"Nay," laughed she, "I'd not so misuse a hungry gentleman. Besides, I'm hoarding my smiles for a rainy day."

"D'ye then foresee a second flood?"

"Nay, but 'tis not smiles, but wit, that his majesty's officers lack."

" 'Tis scarcely kind to say so," protested Fullerton.

"Kind?" questioned she laughing. "Would ye then, for the sake of kindness, offend God by hiding that which he knows as well as we do."

"Ye are gay, Mistress Kate," interjected Maclae with mock reproachfulness.

She looked him full in the eyes. "Tears," she answered slowly, "burn the eyes, therefore, I may not weep. The leaguer is not yet broken. The sunrise

gun in Greene's camp was fired as usual this morning. My father—"

A momentary hush fell upon the little company. It was finally broken by Fullerton.

"Greene is about to decamp," asserted he. "I am just from the lines and the American preparations are not to be mistaken."

"And so, Mistress Kate," remarked the third officer, "ye will presently be at home again."

"A father," added Fullerton, as he helped himself to more wine, "is some times respectable but seldom amusing. I advise ye to stay with us, Mistress Kate. Our hearts are at your service."

"Your hearts! I vow them the softest things on earth—except your heads!" she scoffed.

Fullerton rose and pushed back his chair. "Such as they are, they are beneath your feet," he laughed. "Tread them lightly, Mistress!"

With this sally the party broke up. The officers departed to their several duties and Kate retired to her room. She was glad to escape; under the cover of her raillery, her heart was troubled. Ninety Six was to be abandoned, her father was old and, no doubt bitter against her, and Maclae—Maclae—.

That night as the American army broke camp the rumble of the wagon trains and the artillery fell upon her ears. She hearkened to the sound. In her depression the noise of the revolving wheels recalled to her mind the long roll of muffled drums.

CHAPTER XVII

NIGHT had fallen; and from his bed Anthony heard the steady tramp of the passing soldiery, the rumble of wheels, the objurgations addressed by the teamsters to their laboring beasts. Warned of Rawdon's approach, Greene had broken camp under cover of the darkness, and the American army was in full retreat. It was the purpose of the Continental Commander to cover more than twenty miles before sunrise came.

Anthony listened. There had been a time when he would have rejoiced at the departure of this intrusive force which had inconvenienced him and had by its presence deprived him of the solace of pleasant company, but now he was apathetic. The step of a man upon the veranda roused him from his reverie.

"Come ye in," he called.

In response to the invitation, General Pickens, thin, severe, and trim in his continental uniform, but showing in his narrow face the lines of weariness that had been graven there by the last few days, stepped into the room.

"Again I intrude on you, Anthony," he apologized.

"In my loneliness I welcome ye," replied the old man. "Be seated. . . . Amelie! A glass for General Pickens."

" 'Tis but for a word that I stop," said Pickens, not availing himself of the proffered chair. "That and a passing glass since I am aweary and have a long ride afore me."

"Ye did well to stop," rumbled Anthony. "Hasten, Amelie."

The old woman appeared with a tumbler and Pickens, still standing, received and drained it. "So Mistress Kate hath taken sides against us," he remarked, as he handed the glass back to Amelie.

"Aye," answered Anthony, his harsh, unrazored features showing ghastly brown against his pillows. " 'Twas not politics, however, that moved her action. 'Twas an obsession for yon leaden poppyhead who is called Maclae. She was on fire for him who, in the end, will make her miserable."

"Ah youth!" moralized Pickens. " 'Tis full of the pride of life and its accompanying lusts. Mean ye to reclaim her? The siege hath failed and now ye can communicate."

"The end of the siege and its beginning are one thing to one who is past the end," observed the old man gloomily. "Na'th'less tomorrow I shall send Amelie to her. After all she is mine own and I'll not damn her either to penitential pain or joyless pleasure. With me, her faults and follies are forgot. She hath my nature. I cannot conceive her as other than gay in good fortune or else laughing when in ragged luck."

" 'Tis as God wills," murmured Pickens, "al-

though it is sometimes wiser to let the lost sheep go."

"God?" questioned the paralytic musingly. "O' late, God seems to exhaust Himself in empty space. . . . But we never saw eye to eye in any matter, Pickens, and 'tis not likely that we shall begin to-night. After all 'tis my sheep which hath strayed."

The face of Pickens was troubled. He had liked Kate in spite of the incompatibility between himself and her father. He was undergoing an internal conflict in which his human sympathy warred with his strict presbyterianism.

"Would that I had caught the son of Belial and hanged him," he ejaculated, "before the image of the girl had sprouted in the vinous fallows of his foppish brain."

"Hanging," agreed Anthony, "is an ancient and effective practice which hath lost nothing of its repute. 'Tis most unwholesome to rogues, but is seldom applied sufficiently early."

Pickens waved his hand toward the road. "I must take my leave," he announced.

"Ye have no need to hasten. I find myself lonely—"

" 'Tis not from weariness of ye that I go, but because I must. Doubtless the advance hath already reached the Saluda. I thank ye for the kindly entertainment, Anthony."

He hurried out and the invalid heard him mount and ride away.

"Would that I had his aptitude," muttered the

old man to himself, "to clothe my raw revenges in the raiment of godliness. . . . But Kate—my Kate! Never hath an enemy, however he punished me, been able to wring a cry from me. 'Tis only those we love who are able to visit upon us our utmost anguish."

He lay for a time thinking, then composed himself and tried to sleep. The measured tread of the marching columns had faded into the distance, the last wagon had jolted past, the final horseman had forded the shallow brook which, spread into a tiny pool at the road-crossing, now lay unruffled beneath the white moon and the stars. Behind the old man's closed eyes, hurrying memories passed and repassed persistently.

From their camp in the woods, several miles further removed from Ninety Six than was Fowler's plantation, the two men whom Poston had earlier discovered also hearkened to the passing of the retreating army. The event stirred them to action, for it was for something like this that they had waited. The two were of those who fish in troubled waters. The confusions of war, the sudden shiftings of authority, any roiling of the stream of events, lent to their activities the obscurity which they coveted.

Therefore, as soon as they were certain that Greene's rearguard had crossed the Saluda, these exploiters of opportunity gathered their scant belong-

ings and started hurriedly in the direction of the town. They felt that expedition was desirable on more counts than one. Other adventurers might forestall them and gather the best of the harvest. Also Cruger's scouts, who would shortly be following the Americans, were doubtless not altogether averse to shooting such thieves as they might discover. It was the purpose of the pair to gather the spoil quickly and decamp.

At Fowler's when morning came, the slave women were early astir. Profiting by Amelie's preoccupation with their master, one by one the field-wenches slipped away to seek the men from whom they had for so long been parted. Their ears were as keen as any and they too had heard in the night the sounds that informed them that the leaguer was broken. They wished to know what had happened to Cæsar, Raz, and Dewberry, and their desire proved stronger than their accustomed regard for the usual plantation discipline.

Amelie paid no attention to their unusual departure. The sun was scarcely risen before she was afoot in the same direction as they. She had been charged by Anthony to find Kate and to bring her back to the shelter of her father's house. The errand was a gratifying one to Amelie and she proceeded to its execution with zeal.

Left alone on the plantation, Anthony awaited the result of his effort. His attitude toward his daughter was not even reproachful. He was willing to

receive her on her own terms. She should have her way—even to Maclae.

But at the thought of the man his gorge rose. "I hate him far too subtly to forgive him," he muttered hoarsely.

The wave of passion passed, and he lay grimly considering his own uselessness. "Death is the only pity of mankind," he quoted. "Where did I hear that? Came it to me from priest, preacher, or pedagogue? I have had small dealings with either. . . . 'And even death cometh to every man too soon or too late.' The saying is true, no matter whence it came. 'Tis also true that the mind and the body die not equally. Sometimes mind first expires; with me the will survives but the body is already dead—or half-dead, which is worse."

His attention was diverted from his reflections by the sound of furtive footsteps. These did not approach from the direction of the veranda but from the rear of the house. For a moment Anthony fancied that Amelie was returning, but his quick ear soon detected that the tread was that of alien feet. Moreover two persons, rather than one, were moving about.

"What is wanted?" he roared. "Stifle your modesty and show your faces. I would come unto ye, an I were able."

There was a sudden cessation of all sound; then, afterward, subdued voices in conference. Presently, in the open door of the chamber, two men appeared.

One was slender and of an ape-like countenance, the other gross of figure and heavily bearded.

"Egad, your faces give ye small recommendation and bespeak your honesty to be of the squinting sort," commented Anthony sarcastically. "I warrant ye to be rare hands at dice, cards, or knifeplay. Your very fingers have, it seems to me, a loose, adhesive aspect. What do ye here?"

The two looked at each other. The situation was something beyond their experience.

"Garn," snarled the larger intruder. "What aileth ye?"

The other rogue, nimbler than his fellow in both wit and body, spoke at greater length.

"Look ye, my friend," he observed, "'tis a hard world and we are two who travel seeking that which we may come by. We, so to speak, live by the exercise of our wits and our fingers. 'Tis our purpose, in short, to relieve ye of some trifle in the way of gold, silver, or currency."

Anthony eyed the speaker ironically. "One of ye is a sturdy swine," he answered, "and the other a knave, circumspect in manner but deficient in integrity. The devil bear me witness that, in time past, I have dealt freely with the like of ye. Some I used as it pleased me and others I sent swiftly to hell. Do ye insist that I do as much for you?"

"We come not here to argy," interrupted the bearded one. "We seek gold."

"Nay, I did not esteem ye ignorant of sin nor de-

void of the necessity for repentance," protested Anthony in a voice that was suspiciously mild. " 'Tis in your nature to smack your fleshy lips juicily, even at the moment when Beelzebub waits for your soul and the grass is already growing that shall wave above your head."

The smaller man advanced further into the room. "Ye diddle us to gain time," he charged. "Deliver us your money or ye'll suffer for't." And he plucked forth his knife and tested its point on his thumb.

Anthony's eyes narrowed. "Ye would do murder?" he asked. "Ye would stake your lives on this cast?"

"Yea, and torture ye aforehand," threatened the bearded man. "Waste no time. Disclose! Disclose!" And he too drew his knife and advanced threateningly.

"I have a small hoard laid by," confessed Anthony with feigned reluctance.

"Where is't?"

" 'Tis in yellow sovereigns. Would not a part content ye?"

"Come! Cease chaffering, old man, or I'll tickle ye with my blade. Where lieth your hoard?"

"I have no appetite for the blade," averred Anthony. "Although, had I the use of my legs as ye have of yours, 'twould pleasure me well to drub ye. But if ye have stomach to seek the gold, loosen me yon great stone that is mortared into the jamb of the chimney."

Both intruders turned to look at the stone and as

they did so Anthony moved his hands to and fro under the coverlets.

" 'Tis well mortared and will be hard to move," said the large man as he turned again to Anthony.

" 'Twas meant to be hard to move," replied the old man dryly.

The other drew a hatchet from his belt. "Guard ye without, Drewry," he said to his companion. "Our friend on the bed is no fool and watcheth from his window something too anxiously."

Obeying the suggestion, the smaller rogue stepped quickly into the hall and posted himself at the door which opened upon the veranda. In the meantime the other with the edge of his hatchet began to grave the mortar in which the stone was embedded. It was a close joint and the task of loosening the stone was a difficult one. In a short time the man, red-faced from his exertions, was swearing.

"Do not offend God," roared Anthony with such menace in his voice that the other stood erect and wheeled to face him.

"Why?" stammered the rascal, smitten suddenly with an inexplicable fear.

"Because ye go to meet Him unexpectedly!" With the words, the invalid's hand flashed from beneath the coverlet, the pistol that it held roared, and the blackbearded man, with his terror still unwiped from his countenance, crumpled and fell on his face.

He that was on watch seemed to reach the room in one bound. A glance revealed the situation and as

he sprang toward the bed, Anthony's empty weapon hurtled past his head. As he came, the thief drew his own pistol from his belt, while Anthony, with a sweep upward of his long arm, tore from the bedhead the suspended cutlass.

The report of the pistol and the crashing downstroke of the short, heavy sword were, in effect, simultaneous. The thief clutched at the bedcovers as he fell with a cloven skull. From the half sitting posture, to which his tremendous effort had raised him, Anthony sank back on his pillows while a trickle of blood stained the white front of his shirt. In spite of his hurt, a grim smile swept across the old man's face.

"The sodden fools!" he gasped chokingly from between his blanching lips.

With the words, his eyes closed and a shudder ran through his scarred and bony frame. The room slowly emptied itself of the powder smoke, and the blood on the floor collected into red pools and clotted. Outside, in the brilliant sunshine, the cocks crew, the red wings of a cardinal flashed, and a mockingbird trilled a joyous melody.

Late in the afternoon a small group of people approached the farmhouse from the direction of the town, while a single pedestrian made his way cautiously from the opposite direction toward the same objective. The group was headed by Kate Fowler. In company with Amelie and with her re-

assembled black people trooping behind her horse, she was coming home—at least for a season. For the moment the love that redeems had triumphed over the love that consumes. With her accustomed energy she had recovered from Cruger her menservants and their hire. If Ninety Six was abandoned, she did not purpose to set forth either helpless or penniless. Whatever the state of her affections, her instincts as a business manager did not go awry.

The solitary pedestrian was Saul Poston. He was not advancing to congratulate Cruger on his victory, nor to welcome Rawdon on his arrival. Indeed a British officer was now a less welcome apparition to this one-time supporter of King George than was an American. In fact Poston was merely seeking to recover certain property which he had once hidden in the gray horse's stall.

The tory reached the house in advance of the small group composed of Kate and her negroes, who, however, were sufficiently near to see him enter. In a few moments he emerged hastily and ran toward them.

"There's hell to pay!" he yelled.

Kate reined in her horse. "What ails ye, Saul?" she demanded breathlessly.

Poston had seen too much of death and bloodshed to lose his presence of mind. He beckoned to Amelie and at the same time answered Kate.

" 'Tis your father, Mistress. He hath been bloodily used."

Her face paled and she reeled in her saddle, but in the next moment she recovered command of herself so that her whole poise expressed resolution.

"He who is guilty shall account to me," she muttered from her compressed lips.

But Amelie, with her vulturine neck outstretched, was already padding forward like a blood hound on a scent. Poston glanced at her with interest.

"Soft of foot, bloodshotten of eye, and as conscienceless as a wolf," he muttered.

But Kate was not listening. "Ye are a trailer, Saul," she rapped out. "Hound them down; bring them afore me; and name your price!"

"Nay," answered Poston shaking his head. "The account of yon miscreants hath already been rendered. Think ye that your father was a suckling or a dove? He hath gone, 'tis true, but he hath taken his adversaries with him. Yonder they lie, slain by his hand."

"Show me!"

"I would not, were I you, Mistress. Get ye back to the town and send help. Take a wench with you. I'll keep the men and will order matters."

But she did not heed. With an imperious gesture, she rode forward, dismounted and entered the house, Poston and the negro men following while the wenches huddled in the yard. Amelie, already within, met them at the door and in ominous silence motioned them toward the death chamber.

Kate crossed the room as if unconscious of the

blood through which she strode. She laid a hand upon her father's forehead and stood thus, gazing at his stiffened form. Suddenly she started and turned.

Then she pointed to the bodies of the thieves. "Throw me yon carrion forth!" she ordered.

"Anthony's daughter!" muttered Poston. "She hath taken hurt but she will not show it." He turned to the negro, Cæsar. "Get ye to Captain Maclae," he said, "and tell him what's to be found here. As for me, I dare not tarry." He went out toward the barns, but presently turned and looked back. "Ye were a man, Anthony!" he apostrophized. Then he moved on and the gathering darkness swallowed him.

CHAPTER XVIII

WITH throbbing drums and fluttering flags, Rawdon marched into Ninety Six. Miles away Cruger with an escort composed of all the horsemen of the garrison had met him and compliments and congratulations had been exchanged. The shadow of the inevitable—the necessity for the abandonment of the post—was over the hearts of both but was not revealed by their faces as they rode triumphantly through the narrow streets and received with smiles and bows the plaudits of the unsuspecting multitude.

To the distant sounds, therefore, of martial music and the echoing footsteps of marching battalions—men as careless of him as he, when he lived, had been careless of them—Anthony Fowler was lowered into a narrow grave in one of the fields that lay adjacent to the town. At his burying there were present only his daughter, dry-eyed and implacable, Maclae with two or three of his officer friends, and the negroes of the farm. The obsequies were starkly simple. One of the officers read the burial service of the English Church and afterward Raz, Cæsar, and Dewberry filled in the grave.

When the darkness fell, all had departed save Amelie—she remained sitting silent and impassive

beside the raw, red mound. Later, when the constellations had formed a certain pattern in the heavens, she heaved herself erect and went away and came again bearing a black cock. With the point of her knife she slit the throat of the bird and, while the blood dripped on the grave and the round moon showed its rim above the eastern horizon, she made demands on the gods of her fathers—on the dark and supple gods who rule where sluggish rivers ripple like lazy serpents between poisonous mudbanks and fetid thickets.

It was more than a week later that Kate Fowler walked into the presence of Lord Rawdon and Colonel Cruger.

"Do I intrude, gentlemen," she began. "If not, I beg of you that you will entrust me with certain information."

Cruger, ever the gentleman, was already offering her a chair while Rawdon, yellow and ill, rose to his feet and bowed.

"Ye have well-earned the right to an audience, Mistress," acknowledged the latter.

They seated themselves. "It hath long been rumored, my Lord," said the young woman, coming directly to the point, "that you will find it necessary to evacuate this post."

Rawdon moved uneasily and frowned. "'Tis a hard choice that is offered me," he replied complainingly. "Our forces are depleted—'tis necessary to contract our lines so that we may hold them with

fewer men. Even now 'tis rumored that the French fleet hath designs on Charles Town. Yet, in order to relieve Ninety Six, I have stripped Balfour of his best troops. Yea, and more, for I have exceeded my orders and have diverted for the same purpose the regiments destined to reinforce Sir Henry Clinton in New York. How Sir Henry will regard my presumption, God alone knows."

"Sir Henry will commend your prompt and effective action," asserted Cruger confidently.

"I trust it may be so. But, look ye, Mistress Kate, Greene hath withdrawn but he is not destroyed. How long will it be after I turn my back before he will be investing the town again?"

Kate did not answer. She had on more than one occasion discussed this phase of the matter with Maclae. She had sought this interview with no intention of opening an argument, but simply to obtain the authentic information necessary to the proper ordering of her affairs. Cruger, however, began to explain.

"It is not our intention, Mistress Kate," he said, "to abandon the loyal folk who have gathered here under our protection. We must and shall take steps to insure their safety."

"'Twill scarcely be possible," interjected Kate bluntly, "to guarantee the people here against the inroads of the enemy if the King's army is so far away as Charles Town."

"If your people here were all of your temper,

Mistress," answered Rawdon, "the task would be easier. In such case they would all take arms and defend themselves against ordinary raids. And, if the Americans should appear in force, I could again march to their relief. But they lack stomach for fighting. I have already proposed an arrangement of this nature but meet with no favorable response."

"Many are old men," apologized Cruger. "Others are cumbered with women and little children. Most are traffickers and mechanics rather than woodsmen. They could make but small headway against Pickens's shaggy riflemen and they know it."

"Aye, they've grown fat purveying to this garrison and hesitate to risk their gains," agreed Kate contemptuously. "Those fit for service are already enrolled in his Majesty's regiments or else have slipped away to join McCall and Pickens. The remainder esteem a whole skin of greater value than a military reputation."

" 'Tis true," assented Cruger.

"It follows, then," said Rawdon, "that we have no choice other than to withdraw these people within our new lines. Colonel Cruger will issue a proclamation to this effect tomorrow."

"But how will so large a number of refugees obtain subsistence in Charles Town?" inquired Kate.

" 'Twill not be necessary for them to live in the city," replied Rawdon. "There are abandoned lands in any quantity in the lower country. These your people may cultivate and thus obtain a livelihood."

Kate did not express her opinion of the plan, but she knew that, the planting season being long past, it must be far more than a year before these uprooted folk could hope to produce the food necessary to sustain them. His Lordship, however, being quite ignorant of practical farming, gave that aspect of the undertaking small consideration and proceeded to outline the tactical moves necessary to accomplish this laborious removal in safety.

"I have already communicated with Balfour," he explained, "and Stuart, with the Third Regiment, is advancing by way of Orangeburg. I will take eight hundred men of our present force and meet him at the Congarees. Thus I will interpose an effective force between Greene and the lower route to Charles Town. As soon as I have reached Congarees, Colonel Cruger will set his people hereabout in motion, dispatching the civilians in successive parties down the southern branch of the Edisto. As soon as the last wagons are in motion, he will follow and cover the withdrawal with his entire command. What think you of the plan, Colonel?"

"Regarded as a military maneuver, it is entirely sound," replied Cruger guardedly. But Kate noticed that the thoughtful Colonel expressed no opinion as to the economic wisdom of the undertaking. After replying to Rawdon, he turned to her. "I would have you know, Mistress Kate," he remarked, "that we are not unmindful of the service that you have rendered us. If there is aught that his Majesty's

troops can do to lighten the labor of your removal, you have but to mention it."

Kate rose and curtsied. "I thank ye, Colonel," she responded. "I did but wish the information which I have received in order that my wagons may be among the first to move. I shall return to the farm and begin my preparations."

"Bravely spoken!" applauded Rawdon.

"Nay, 'tis not bravery," she demurred. " 'Tis only a prompt yielding to a hard necessity." Then she dropped another curtsey and went out.

When the intended evacuation was announced to the populace, a wail of despair went up. Under Cruger's administration the neighborhood had for a long time enjoyed immunity from the raids and sudden disturbances which had characterized the recent warfare in many sections of the province. Taking advantage of this temporary security, persons who wished to engage in the ordinary pursuits of peace had gladly taken refuge in the town. Some had prospered and even those who could boast no material gain were loth to surrender the comforting assurance of order, justice, and safety which for some time had been theirs.

But in spite of all reluctance, it was evident that the end had come. The farms must be abandoned, the workshops closed, and the shelves of the traders denuded. Each family must take that which they could transport and follow the army. It was not a march which was proposed but a migration.

A few days later Rawdon, with about one-third of the troops which he had brought with him from Charles Town, moved off according to plan toward Congarees. Greene marched to meet the advancing forces, but as usual was dilatory and Rawdon reached Fort Granby on the Congaree River fully two days in advance of the Americans. Having thus failed to interpose his army between Rawdon and Stuart, the Continental Commander contented himself with cautiously following his opponent toward Orangeburg.

Covered in this way by Rawdon's advance, as well as by the almost impassable swamps of the North Fork of the Edisto, Cruger began to dispatch in small units the melancholy caravan of migrating tories. To clear the road for these non-combatants, Captain Maclae in command of all that remained of Dunlap's Mounted Infantry was sent out in advance. During the day these horsemen rode far in front of the civilian train, but in the evening they fell back and reëstablished contact with it.

The migrants were not a compact body and moved without order. Some were afoot and carried what they might of their possessions on their shoulders, some drove slow-moving oxen which were yoked to great, clumsy carts, some were on horseback and were followed by one or more wagons, while the whole formed a writhing, nondescript, struggling mass, confused but bound together by the line of the road and extending from front to rear for some twenty or thirty miles. One thing they had in common; they

all moved in one direction—moved painfully but persistently from the hills and the forests toward the sea. There were men there who were crook-backed with age and infirmity, women with babes in their arms, and footsore children who fell by the wayside and slept the sleep of exhaustion until roused and forced to trudge on.

Behind this procession of misery marched the compact columns of Cruger's infantry. It was the duty of the soldiers to screen from hostile bands these helpless wayfarers, to pick up the stragglers and hurry them forward, and to bury such hapless ones as fell and died by the way. It was not a pleasing task, and Cruger's fine face grew careworn and weary as he witnessed the suffering which he was helpless to allay.

Far in front of the main body of the refugees there was to be found the two well-horsed wagons of Kate Fowler of Fowler's farm, but it was not cowardice which placed her first. Indeed in this journey the extreme advance was in the position of the greatest danger, for between it and any lurking menace there was interposed only Maclae's thin screen of horsemen. In fact, Kate's decision to be among the first over the road had been influenced by considerations entirely foreign to either the presence of danger or the absence of it.

For once, the demands of the practical had coincided with those of the sentimental. If it was true that by following close on the heels of Maclae's horsemen she was assured of being frequently in the

Captain's company, it was none the less certain that by preceding the host that followed she would find abundant pasturage for her beasts as well as unpolluted camping grounds. The superiority of her equipment now enabled her to accomplish her purpose with ease.

She rode her own saddlehorse and her wagons were laden with only the most necessary articles of bedding and clothing—all other space being utilized for the transport of food, utensils, and tools. Cæsar piloted one wagon, Raz the other. Dewberry with the women—excepting Amelie who, as cook, rode in one of the wagons—herded forward the black cattle which the party were attempting to bring away with them.

Her wagons were already well advanced into the peninsula formed by the two branches of the Edisto and were on the point of crossing the northern stream in order to proceed into Orangeburg, when Kate, after riding all day with Maclae, approached one evening her camp which her blacks had pitched near the banks of a rivulet. Glancing at the scene before her, she found ample justification for her action in hastening on in advance of her compatriots. There was green grass in abundance on every hand. Her wagons had been drawn aside from the beaten track and were sheltered under a great oak in whose shadow their canvas tilts shone as blurs of white. Behind the wagons the draught-horses were tethered and were munching ear-corn from the troughs which were

attached to the tail-boards of the vehicles. A little further off the cattle had made themselves beds on the sward and breathed loudly and contentedly as they chewed their cuds. So far, her people had so much out-distanced their fellow-refugees that there was not another camp-fire in sight.

Near the streamlet three columns of smoke from three separate fires rose perpendicularly toward the quiet evening sky. At one of the fires Amelie was preparing supper; around another the other negroes had gathered themselves. To the latter this tragedy of expatriation represented merely a holiday from the drab monotony of their labors.

At the third fire a single homespun clad individual had seated himself. In the hollow of his arm a long rifle rested and to the belt that encircled his waist a hunting knife was attached. Before him there was a tin plate of Amelie's providing filled with meat and bread. Although he had not laid aside his weapons this newcomer was attacking the provisions assiduously. But as Kate approached he rose.

"'Tis Saul Poston," she exclaimed in some surprise. "How came you here, Saul?"

Poston put his head awry and appeared to cogitate. "I would ha' rid," he answered finally, "had luck provided me with a beast. Lacking the nag I walked—and sweated, for these sandy roads in summer are hotter than the middle kittle of hell!"

"Verily!" she commented lightly. "Yet in spite of your habitual circumspectness, ye have dealt, at times,

somewhat shiftily. May it not be well, therefore, that ye experience aforetime some of the pains of heat? Mayhap such discomfort will urge you in the direction of a late repentance.—But proceed with your meal; doubtless ye are hungry and footsore."

Poston seated himself again. "I am sometimes weary, often hungry, and always thirsty," he replied sententiously. "Begging your indulgence, then, I will finish my supper. A man must eat if he would live to drink." And he addressed himself once more to his plate.

Kate regarded him with a smile which softened the stern lines which had replaced recently the cupid's-bow of her lips. "I sh'd think," she remarked, "that with so many brooks about, thirst might be the least of your troubles."

"Listen to yon frog," suggested Poston irrelevantly. And indeed the frogs in the marsh beyond the little stream had been croaking noisily for some time.

"Well, what of the frog?" asked she, taking the plate of food which Amelie now tendered her.

"That frog hath an abundance of water about him and yet he loatheth it. In his despair he voiceth his own need and mine. He crieth 'jug-o-rum! jug-o-rum!' "

"A pannikin of the liquor ye shall have, but no more," replied Kate decisively.

" 'Tis a hard world," sighed Poston with an air of resignation, "in which we must fain content ourselves with that which we may come by."

Kate brought him the drink. "How is it that ye have lost the fear of Rawdon that obsessed ye when we were last together?" she inquired.

The woodsman took a long draught of his liquor. Then, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he made answer.

"Rawdon is not here but somewhere between the Congarees and Orangeburg," he observed. "Moreover, were he here, so many things have happened since my last speech with him that likely he would fail to recall such an old matter. Nevertheless, Mistress Kate, I have made my peace with Cruger, not only by reminding him of my past service, but by bringing him further intelligence fresh from the camp of Greene."

"Ye have dared penetrate to Greene's camp then?"

"Aye; also those of Sumter and Lee—an odd trinity of names, no one of which is likely to be found on the muster rolls of Paradise."

"Did none recognize ye? It seems to me that you risked apprehension."

"Yea, in faith I was recognized but I used the cognizance for my credit. I need not tell ye that I waited until Pickens was detached for service elsewhere before presenting myself. Afterward 'twas easy. D'ye recall a certain sergeant and his officer with whom we dealt in the matter of the rum. The two avouched me— Indeed, Mistress Kate, rum hath much virtue as a solvent of difficulties."

Kate laughed. "You're a man of resource, Saul," she commented, "as well as of questionable morality. An the Americans win, I doubt me not that ye will draw a pension from them on some such evidence."

"It may be so," returned the woodsman easily. "Greene oweth me somewhat. I disclosed to him confidentially much that he already knew and it is undoubtedly grateful to a man to be confirmed in his own opinion."

"What hath the Continental Commander in mind?"

"At present he threateneth Orangeburg, but undoubtedly longeth for his usual 'camp of repose.' 'Tis my guess that he will retire to the Santee without offering battle and from his secure retreat encourage the militiamen to resume their raids. When these succeed the laurels are Greene's; when they fail the willows are their own."

A step interrupted them and Maclae appeared in the circle of light cast by the fire.

"Poston!" he exclaimed.

"At your service, Cap'n."

"I had not expected to see you."

"I ginnerly try to be whar I'm not expected—'tis safer. But you are whar I expected to find you. I have orders for ye."

"From whom?"

"Colonel Cruger. He bids ye await him when ye reach Orangeburg."

"This order means that whole field army will concentrate there?"

"Doubtless. . . . As I make out, the civilians will pass on while the army will confront the Americans. The refugees are supposed to plant themselves on the vacant lands of the lower parishes, but I much doubt that they possess the hardihood to so expose themselves. The bulk of them will join those fled from Camden who have already formed a sort of hutment on Charles Town Neck. 'Tis said that this settlement cometh to be called Rawdontown—'tis a most miserable spot and I advise ye, Mistress, to avoid it."

"I shall make no settlement either in the open country or in this so-called Rawdontown," averred Kate. "As Captain Maclae is aware, 'tis my purpose to press on into the city and there await more settled times." She glanced at Maclae, who nodded in confirmation.

Poston arose. "I give ye goode'en," he said, and passing around the wagons, vanished into the darkness.

By the cook-fire Amelie sat alone and mumbled unintelligibly.

CHAPTER XIX

NINETY SIX had been evacuated for more than a year. The upper country having been irretrievably lost to the British, Rawdon, posting his principal force at Orangeburg, had established a cordon of posts about Charles Town in an effort to retain control of the coastal area. But presently his Lordship had fallen ill and had taken ship for England, leaving the field army in charge of Colonel Stuart while the garrison of the city proper was still commanded by Colonel Balfour.

On the American side, Greene and his Continentals for a long time had remained inactive, but the partisan leaders had been so increasingly enterprising that on more than one occasion they had pushed their raids to the very gates of Charles Town. Lee, Sumter, Pickens, Marion, and Harden had all been moving and their successes had so discouraged Stuart that he felt it necessary to further constrict his lines. With this in view, he began to fall back from Orangeburg toward the seaport.

Greene set the American army in motion in pursuit of Stuart. The partisans having won another campaign, the Commander of the Southern Department was not averse to sharing the triumph and making a brave show of chasing the enemy into the city. But

at Eutaw Springs, like a bull at bay, Stuart turned and stood.

The battle of Eutaw was of a piece with most of Greene's pitched battles. The Americans were checked and finally driven from the field, but Stuart's troops had been so badly cut up that on the following night he abandoned his baggage and his wounded and precipitately resumed his retreat.

Two months after Eutaw, the surrender of Cornwallis to Washington at Yorktown, Virginia, brought conviction to every combatant in South Carolina that the war was virtually at an end. Thereafter, pending the formal close of hostilities, the British held Charles Town and its environs; the Americans the remainder of the state, Greene's army being stationed in observation some twenty or thirty miles from the town. Excepting the sending out of foraging parties, there were no military activities on either side.

As a result of this inactivity and the consequent slackening of discipline, both armies fell more or less into disorder. Added to this, both Greene and General Leslie, who had succeeded to the command in Charles Town, experienced grave difficulty in supplying their troops. Greene, neglected by the Congress, needed clothing, blankets, hardware, salt, and other manufactured articles. Leslie, debarred from drawing supplies from the open country, suffered for want of fresh provisions.

Under such circumstances it was inevitable that a semi-contraband trade should spring up between the

city and the territory controlled by the Americans. Indeed, the opposing commanders winked at such traffic, realizing that it could have no effect on the terms of the coming peace and that it did, in a large measure, relieve their immediate necessities. The rivers flowing into Charles Town offered easy natural channels through which to prosecute such exchanges.

On a night in the summer of 1782, the Ashley River, in its shrunken and diminished upper reaches, lay smooth and untroubled in the light of the moon. To the northward lay the fort and village of Dorchester, now abandoned by its British garrison and occupied by the Americans. To the south were marshes, lagoons, and the wilderness.

The surface of the river, glistening like polished glass in the wan, silvery light, was broken by only one object. This was a long dugout, or periauger, fashioned from the trunk of a tree and fitted with rowlocks and oars. The craft moved as noiselessly as a shadow against the current, the rowlocks being covered with rawhide and the oars muffled. It was propelled by the powerful arms of three brawny negroes, while in the stern another man—white, this one—sat upon a pile of merchandise and steered. Now and then in a low tone, the latter gave some directions.

Presently, in response to a word from the steersman, the craft veered sharply toward the northern bank and, slacking speed, approached a bare and

trodden space that appeared among the bushes which elsewhere overhung the stream.

"Steady with the boat, Raz," cautioned the steersman.

"Steady it be," answered one of the negroes, as the craft slipped deftly alongside the improvised landing.

From the neighboring undergrowth another man, clad in homespun trousers and a checked shirt, stepped quickly out and caught, and began to make fast, the mooring lines thrown to him by the negro.

"All quiet, Goolsby?" asked the steersman as he stepped ashore. "How goes the trading?"

"Trade's fair, barrin' the usual complaints as to quality. An' there's no interference. But ye're late, Poston."

"Aye, one who was to have met me in the way of trade, lower down, was slow in appearing. But where's the Sargint? Not that I pine for his company but that his presence, though something costly in rum and perquisites, giveth our enterprise an air of authority."

"He hath stepped away for the moment. Mayhap he is seeking some adventurous wench whose fancies have drawn her too nigh the appletree."

"Well, hot lands gender hot fruits. Come, let's get the goods out and the provisions aboard." He turned to the negroes. "Lay your backs to it, my bullies," he continued. " 'Tis but two hours till the turn o' the

tide. Gi'e us luck and we'll spend all day tomorrow with the gals in town—that too with drink in our bellies and money in our pockets. Step lively, I say, and pass out the blankets and the hardware."

The negroes bent in silence to the task, while the two white men, still in conversation, walked somewhat aside. Some papers were passed between them and a few gold pieces gleamed momentarily and clinked as they exchanged ownership. In the swamp an owl hooted.

"Rutledge hath made proclamation inviting all tories to return to their homes," announced Goolsby presently.

"Say ye so? Rutledge will allow the royalists the use of their own property? An' the old rebel do so, 'tis his first godly deed. Ha' ye the proclamation by ye?"

The other passed him a broadsheet printed in large characters.

"So!" he grunted, folding the sheet and placing it carefully in his wallet. Then he turned again to the negroes. "So soon as the drygoods are out, begin to load the beef and the rice," he directed.

The relading was but half accomplished when a sound of footsteps in the underbrush momentarily halted operations. Both Poston and his companion caught up their rifles and the latter challenged.

"Hold your fire, ye unchaste ruffians," bellowed some one, and there stepped into the open a man in the uniform of a continental soldier.

Poston laughed and dropped the butt of his weapon to the ground. "What ha' we here," he demanded, "a calf's-tongue or a coronet? 'Tis one or 'tother, else 'twould not bawl so loudly."

"Ha' done," expostulated the soldier, "I fear me ye are as drunk as a carrion-crow, and from my demijohn most likely. I ha' been asleep."

"And what wakened ye, your own snoring or a conviction o' sin?"

"The drought in my throat. 'Tis nigh a week since I kissed a bottle. And I beg ye to have greater care o' the quality o' your liquor. The last ye fetched me was half water, and yet I favor ye, find ye customers, and screen your traffic. God send that this jug tonight contain less moisture!"

"I counsel ye to temperance," admonished Poston dryly, as he produced a demijohn and handed it to the other. "I fear me that drinking and wenching may be the death of ye."

"An such be unhealthy, do ye not yourself feel ill?" retorted the sergeant, taking the jug.

"Godamercy!" protested the other. "What would ye, man? Am I not a son of Adam? Wherefore then should I not rumple a shift or warm my chitterlings with a sup o' rum an it pleaseth me? I am not a hireling; I am an undertaker of sundry callings, wherefore I run the river to fetch ye commodities—to a man of my trade some latitude in deportment is allowable."

"Softly—softly!" warned the sergeant. "Ye make

more noise than the Devil's cow! Were I rich, ye should wait by my trencher at dinner time and tell me lies, but as it is we must traffic as we are able. I ha' a word for you from the Cap'n. He wills that ye shall bring on your next trip a full dozen o' duffels blankets and will see that ye are paid in beef."

"God will that the beef be fat," complained Poston. "The last I had of ye was so thin that the bone did outweigh the flesh, and 'twas in my mind to suspect that the beast had died without assistance."

"Thou lying varlet," expostulated the soldier. " 'Twas a hearty beast—a noble beast. May I ne'er again taste more than spoonmeat, if 'twere not a handsome beast. I saw it butchered myself. Aye, 'twas a noble bull!"

"An it were noble," commented Poston sourly, "it possessed more o' pedigree than it did o' flesh. As to its being a bull, I be a modest man and allow not my mind to dwell on bawdy matters. Na'th'less I'll fetch the blankets. Let the beef be prime and full of weight, mind ye."

By this time the blacks had fully stowed the return cargo and at a signal from Cæsar the speaker stepped back into the periauger. "What? All ready then?" he went on. "Ha' ye laid the rice down snug and the beef atop?— Good— We'll be ten miles downstream agin the settin' o' the moon an' make Charles Town by sunup under kivver o' the mornin' fog.—Cast us loose, Goolsby. Keep a sharp look-

out, man, and don't let the Sargint gull ye—I'd not trust a Continental be he drunk, sober, or penitent. Use all such but as your 'vaunt couriers to the higher officers who are less given to drink and more to believing."

As he spoke the boat had been loosed and, as he felt its motion under him, he again turned to his henchmen, "Give way, lads. Give way!" he urged them, and under the impulse of the oars, the craft swung out toward the midchannel, and moved downstream toward the city.

As soon as smuggling between the armies became possible, Poston had perceived the profit that would accrue to a bold practitioner of this doubtful business. Consequently, as soon as he was able, he had acquired the periauger and had hired from Kate Fowler the negroes, Cæsar, Raz, and Dewberry, as his assistants. Then forming an alliance with Goolsby, who had relations with the American army similar to his own with the British, the two had inaugurated by means of the river a not overdangerous and highly lucrative traffic.

His expedition on the present occasion was only one of the many in which he had been engaged. In fact his trips up and down the stream had, in the absence of any serious interference, assumed in some degree the regularity of a schedule; and those who were privy to the trade confidently expected the arrival of his boat at the end of each regular interval.

And, since he was using her negroes, Kate Fowler's house became his usual haunt whenever he was in the city.

On the morning in question, he reached the vicinity of Charles Town an hour before sunrise. Over the river there hung a pearl-gray fog and partially concealed by this, the boat was directed into a narrow creek which led through high marshgrass toward the upper and landward outskirts of the town. The northern bank of this creek impinged on firm soil; the southern was a morass which was flooded at high-tide. Beyond this marsh began the streets of the city.

The dry ground on the other side of the creek formed a sort of peninsula between the creek and the river. On this tongue of land there were a few houses but mostly of the meaner sort. To the northeast of these there lay a roadway which led, farther along, to the main highway leading out of the town.

Somewhat removed from the other dwellings, there was a more pretentious residence. This was of two stories, stood with its gable to the roadway, and formed the southern side of a square enclosure which otherwise was bounded by a board wall and by negro cabins sufficient for three or four families. It was near this place that Poston beached his boat, for the house was Kate Fowler's residence.

Leaving the negroes to transfer his cargo to a shelter, where it might lie hidden until his customers

came seeking it, Poston, shouldering a prime piece of beef he had brought, made his way to the postern gate in the rear of the Fowler house. His vigorous knocking aroused Amelie who came and unlocked the gate.

"As the night passes, ye come creeping in," she grumbled in her harsh gibberish.

"Why, ye misbegotten daughter of the Devil's ram," he retorted as he handed her the beef, "but for my goin's to and fro in the darkness on yon river, your larder might be stocked with naught better than stale fish and dried herrings. But I would speak with Mistress Kate. Is she still asleep?"

Amelie shook her head and groaned. "Beds," she said, "are made for sleep, yet no bed can bring sleep to a woman who is kissed ere she is wived. My mistress weareth a heavy crown and sharp with thorns. I would that one Maclae were dead or gone north. He is but swill—the wash of the swine-troughs!"

"Think ye not that the two will wed, now that the confusion of fighting is nigh overpast?"

The old woman mumbled unintelligibly. Her red eyes seemingly had grown redder, her lower lip drooled.

"I would I could understand ye," remarked Poston impatiently. "Your tongue turneth upon itself and uttereth confusion, and your mood is as bitter as though ye had been suckled at the black teats of a tigress. However, since you have no under-

standable voice, let your cookpot speak. Lay yon beef aside and find me, if ye can, somewhat wherewith to stay my appetite."

The old woman, still grumbling, turned toward the kitchen in response to his request. He followed her with his eyes. "Ye are a raven that croaks when the sun is shining," he apostrophized.

As she disappeared he seated himself, withdrew from his wallet the broadsheet which Goolsby had given him, and began to study it. "This," he muttered, as he tapped the paper with his finger, "should be of large moment to the Cap'n and Mistress Kate. It openeth a way out of the coil. They have but to avail themselves of Rutledge's offer, get them back to the fat farm in the cleanly hills, and there gender their children in peace. But were I the Cap'n, I'd 'ware old Amelie—her gall hath turned sour!"

His reflections were interrupted by the old woman's return with his breakfast. He addressed himself to this with so much zeal that he did not see Kate when she entered.

"Ye are diligent in trencher work, Saul," she began with a touch of her old raillery.

"Yea, 'twas a righteous man who first bethought him of breakfasting. A man must eat if he would live; and he should live if for no more than to repent the manner of his life. I have a paper here for ye."

She took the broadsheet and perused it with her

eyebrows knitted. "Think ye that this is to be trusted, Saul?" she inquired.

"Aye," he answered. "'tis authentic."

"Then all of us are free to return to our homes when we choose?"

"Aye, free—even solicited—even pressed—to repopulate our abandoned farms, to repossess our houses and appurtenances, and to apply ourselves diligently to the production of crops, livestock, and good citizens. . . . Be advised, mistress, that yon sons of Beelzebub—or patriots, as 'tis the late fashion to call them—are not wholly fools. Having set up in the King's room their lean and lousy commonwealth, they lack wherewith to support their government. Refugees pay no taxes, nor do abandoned fields yield aught that may be seized. Therefore, seeing that good coin hath no need to declare its politics, we are asked to return in order that we may aid the revenues. Verily, we are urged to come home and pay taxes!"

"Ye wax persuasive. Is't your purpose—?"

"Nay, not me. The river traffic is none so bad. Now were Pickens a Methody, I'd consider it, for in that case he might forgive my falling from grace once in so often; but being the Presbyterian that he is, I fear he considereth me predestined to hang. . . . Na'th'less, Mistress Kate, it hath occurred to me that ye should be returning."

She stood considering. "Well, 'tis possible," she finally admitted. "I'll think on't. Think ye that in

the town today ye will encounter the Captain Maclae? If so, summon him to me—I would take his counsel."

After Poston had departed, Kate Fowler went thoughtfully about her daily duties. For a long time it had been evident to her that, in a degree, Maclae's passion had cooled. He still visited her; indeed at times the fires of the flesh burned as high in him as ever, but in other moments he was reluctant and distrait. Nor could she, for all her wits, do more than surmise the seat of his trouble.

But she had noted that he had ceased to speak of marriage—and in that she sensed her tragedy. She did not discontinue their relations—she had sacrificed so much that she felt herself entitled to any shreds of happiness which she might salvage. Soon enough, she told herself, would come the long slow years in which there would fade away, undesired and unused, the fairness of her womanhood—years in which she would sleep but to dream of the past and waken to loneliness and empty arms.

This morning she realized that the tragedy, held so long in solution between herself and Maclae, was nearing precipitation. She knew that the war was in reality ended, that Maclae was contemplating the possibility of a return to New York, and that he had uttered no word which would indicate a desire that she should accompany him. "What did he wish?" she asked herself.

In her own heart, she had already framed the

answer although she would not permit her lips to utter it. Reluctantly she began to prepare to return to Ninety Six.

At about the time that Poston was taking leave of Kate Fowler, Captain Hugh Maclae was stretching his long limbs, in his comfortable quarters in the officers' club house in Charles Town, and rising from his bed. But in spite of his pleasing surroundings he was a troubled man. He, too, had read Rutledge's proclamation and felt that it raised questions that demanded clear definition. Also, no earlier than the previous evening, he had received a letter from his mother in reply to one of his own.

In this letter Rosina Maclae agreed with her son that, in view of the virtual suspension of hostilities, he might in honor offer to resign his commission as an officer in the King's service. She pointed out to him, too, that owing to the pending change in the government, the finances of the house of Maclae would probably be imperilled and that his presence in New York was desirable on this account. And finally, she spoke to him of the pleasure of his home where, in company with Miss Bettina Van Clear now in the full bloom of her womanhood, an anxious mother awaited him.

Now Maclae had considered the possibility of taking Kate to wife, but, after reading his mother's letter, he felt himself unequal to any such heroic gesture. His relations with Kate were well known in

the town and, according to the code of the officer caste, a man might abandon a mistress but must never marry her. Furthermore, his first duty was to his mother, he told himself. Besides, there was Bettina to be considered; and the more he thought of Bettina the more desirable she appeared. He persuaded himself that Bettina had a very definite claim on his person, for he knew her to be fair.

He finished his dressing, and sitting down, wrote out his resignation. Then he began a letter to Kate, setting forth with much argument his decision to return to New York without her. He wrote because he lacked the resolution for a personal interview—because he did not feel sure that in her presence he could break with her. He had just completed this labored epistle when Poston, unannounced, stalked into the room.

Maclae, frowning, rose from his chair. "Ye are something abrupt," he commented.

"Ye should not hold me to formalities," protested the other. "I pray for ye at supper time on Sundays. But mine errand is to bid ye to Mistress Kate. She hath matters to be considered and would have speech with ye."

The blood in Maclae's face came and went. "I doubt me that I can at present wait upon her," he replied undecidedly. "My own affairs press me. I am called, in haste, to New York and must push my preparation. I trust that Mistress Kate may prosper without me."

Poston's mouth had fallen agape. "Ye—would go to New York—" he stammered, "without Mistress Kate?"

"Aye, aye," answered the officer, his voice thick with embarrassment. "'Tis a serious matter—I have need of haste."

"And I am to tell her so? And that ye will not see her?"

"Nay, not that!" he interjected with sudden resolution. "In a few days—when my mind is less disordered—say to her that I shall see her."

Poston turned slowly and sought the door. "There are those," he said as he went, "who are more fitted to consort with swine than to caress a maid."

Later, when he had come back to Amelie's kitchen, he had speech with the old woman. "'Tis strange talk, that I have heard," he observed. "Yon Captain—Maclae—telleth me that he is taking passage—for himself alone, mind ye—to the north'ard. I lack courage to say so much to Mistress Kate."

Amelie gulped as one does who swallows a bitter draught. "Belike," she answered, "he layeth aside the used coin for another fresh from the mint." Then her wrath convulsed her and other words, obscene, chest-driven, and guttural, came flowing from her lips.

CHAPTER XX

IT was two weeks later and Maclae was on his way to his final interview with his mistress. His letter announcing his decision to break with her had been delivered and a sufficient time had elapsed to allow both himself and Kate to accustom themselves to the idea of an irrevocable separation. In the meantime his resignation from the King's army had been offered and accepted, his affairs in Charles Town had been put in order, and his passage to New York—a passage which led back to his mother, back to Bettina Van Clear, back to the old life of opulence and ease—had already been booked. But now, after everything was arranged, his habitual vacillation had assailed him and he had sought from Kate and had obtained a last meeting.

Having succeeded in overcoming Kate's reluctance, Maclae was presently none too sure that he had been wise in his insistence. With his appetites sharpened by abstention, the infinite lure of the woman was the more strongly felt. The air was soft, an indolent breeze drifted in across the marshes, the subtle odor of the jasmines filled a man with longings and loosened the fibres of his will.

Kate, sitting in her best chamber, awaited her recalcitrant lover's appearance. Years afterward,

when she had won material success and had become one of the principal landholders of the Ninety Six neighborhood, she remembered this morning cloyed with the scent of the jasmine, which she could no longer bear, and mocked by a still, funereal silence; while outside the slow tide crept up the river and the sky above shone with a hard, blue brilliance.

But she was Anthony's daughter. Of the turmoil of her emotions there was little expressed in her face. Her features were white but composed, there were lines of repression about her mouth, her hands were steady, her eyes dark and inscrutable. A weaker woman would have declined to see Maclae, but it was not in the nature of Kate Fowler to avoid an unpleasant encounter. Long ago she had foreseen this day and had steeled herself to meet it.

Immediately after the receipt of the incoherent letter which had severed their relations, she had accepted the inevitable and had charted her course. She still had her slaves, and the proclamation of Rutledge had made possible her return to her home and her plantation. She had not hesitated. Her preparations for leaving the city were now practically complete.

Nor did she desire revenge even in the first bitterness of her overt rejection. She had loved Maclae—she still loved him—and she did not regret anything that she had given him.

"I desired him," she told herself, "and I have had him. At the touch of his hand, I have grown hot and

cold with rapture; I have felt his kisses hot upon my lips; I have given him back pressure for pressure. I have this to remember in the long void days that are to come; nothing can ever take from me that which I have had!"

She sat dry-eyed and not a quiver shook the firm line of her lips.

Then the gate-latch clicked and, glancing that way, she saw his familiar figure coming for the last time up the walk to her door. Momentarily a spasm of agony broke through the calm surface of her studied composure.

"Ah, Hugh! Hugh!" she muttered. "'Tis you who are leaving me when I would have gone with you down into the great darkness had ye but held out a hand to me!"

But in the next moment she was again mistress of herself. "Come ye in," she answered evenly to his knock on the door.

He entered and stood looking uncertainly at her.

"Well, Hugh, ye're here," he said quietly. "Come, sit ye down."

Instead of seating himself he suddenly started forward with his arms outstretched. "Kate!" he ejaculated.

She stepped backward. "Nay, keep away—we have done with all that!" she warned him.

He checked himself. "Ye hate me then, Kate?" he asked.

"To suffer your hands now," she explained,

"would prove me the strumpet that the world esteemeth me. What would ye with me, Hugh?"

"To bid ye farewell, Kate. To bemoan the hard fate that parts us. To assure myself that ye do not despise me utterly."

"I do not despise ye, albeit I could wish ye more of a man. E'en so, I would give ye happiness—an I could! Aye, heaven—an I could! But be used of ye, that I will not!"

"I use ye, Kate? I, who deplore the cruel necessity—?"

"I'll ha' none of your compassion—nor that of any man!"

"But Kate! Sweet Kate! I cannot leave ye thus. To ask it is to demand of flesh more than a man can bear!" Gross desire had come into his eyes, and again he stepped forward.

"Nay," she interposed with a decisive gesture, "if ye may say no more than that, I pray ye ha' done and begone."

Never had she seemed more beautiful. He leaned toward her; his utterance grew thick. "But what if I find that I cannot leave ye, Kate?" he asked hoarsely. "What if I have forgotten the compulsion of my affairs and do naught but dream of ye night and day? Would ye then wed me, Kate? Would ye?"

She shook her head. " 'Tis not possible," she answered. "In our most intimate moments I'd be poisoned with doubts of ye, and you—you, Hugh—when you had cooled would regret all that which you

had surrendered.—Nay, do not argue. You have seen me as you desired. Now go—go quickly, Hugh! Nay—no kissing. Go!"

But a fire was in his veins. "A last kiss," he demanded. "I'll not go until I have it!"

"Stop!" she commanded, with the ruthlessness of old Anthony ringing in her voice. "Out at that door, or shall I call the blacks and cast ye forth!"

He stopped short. His questing eyes shifted, and lost hers, and fell. He turned away.

Once outside, he walked in a turmoil of passion toward the town. Then little by little, his cooler reason began to assert itself. When he had reached the more inhabited portion of the city, he drew a long breath of relief.

"Egad!" he soliloquized. "'Tis over—'tis well over. I vow the witch hath me under a spell. What was I about when I well nigh offered her marriage? 'Tis well over, and yet— Can I forget her? But what would I ha' done had she answered 'yea' when I spoke of a wedding?"

Three days later Kate Fowler's wagon—there was but one now—stood laden and ready to move in the roadway in front of the house which she was now abandoning. Her negroes were assembled and these laughed and made merry, for they were glad to be free of the restrictions of the city, glad to know that at the end of the road that awaited them there lay the rolling hills of Ninety Six and the free

fields of Fowler's farm. On this journey there would be no pressure of fleeing hundreds; peace was coming, men were turning again to quiet and uneventful pursuits, and there was heard no longer on the roads, the menacing tramp of men in arms.

But there was one, among this little company of negroes thus assembled for the journey, who evinced no joy at the prospect, made small show of expectation, and went about her tasks as sullenly as one driven by fate. This was old Amelie. Attempting her usual tasks, her hands were unsure and tremulous, and once, very furtively as she gazed at her mistress, she lifted her apron and wiped her red eyes.

"What aileth ye, Amelie?" Kate inquired. "For two days gone, ye have mewed and mowed. Are ye so wedded to the stench of the salt-marshes that ye cannot abear leaving them?"

The old woman showed signs of agitation and distress. "I cannot go," she answered. "'Tis a filthy city—it stinketh of fish and kitchen-grease and lechery—but the way to the hills is barred to Amelie."

"Why cannot ye go?" questioned Kate impatiently. "Is it that ye grow old and dread footwork? The wagon is there if thy limbs fail thee. Think ye that I'd leave ye behind, Amelie?"

"Ai, I know, but I cannot go!" reiterated the old woman doggedly.

"Ye cannot go? And wherefore not? What would

ye do here, old and alone? Would you starve, you old fool, rather than go home? I cannot think what 'tis that hath addled your crooked brain."

"Ai! Ai! But I cannot—I cannot go!"

"I think ye demented. Why, what on earth—"

"The earth is but a little dust that clings to my travelling feet!"

"But cannot ye see that I care for ye—that I cannot have ye wandering and shelterless in the days of your infirmity? Would ye force me to compulsion?"

Then Amelie drew herself erect. "None may compel me," she affirmed. "My master hath seen to that!"

"What mean ye?"

The other plucked open the voluminous bosom of her frock and exposed her withered dugs. From between these she drew a packet wrapped in rawhide. "Look ye on this," she challenged.

Kate took the parcel, opened it, withdrew a paper, and read with astonished eyes. "Why 'tis a deed of manumission!" she exclaimed. "My father, ere he died, has set you free! What meaneth this, Amelie?"

"From the sea, he took me; to the sea, I shall return," she answered cryptically.

"Aye, something of that I have heard. But what can freedom mean to ye?—You do as you please, as it is— And, bond or free, 'tis my duty to care for ye until the end. It cannot be, just because the salt wind hath wakened an old homesickness in ye, that ye would abandon me now."

"I stay!"

"Come, Amelie, come! I have had sorrow enough. Do not compel me to dream of ye as hungry, forlorn, and friendless."

"I shall know no hunger. That which is to be, will be!"

"Can nothing move ye?"

"I stay!"

"Well, may God forgive ye! How are ye furnished? Have ye so much by ye as three half-pence?"

"That which I need, I have."

"Na'th'less I cannot leave ye naked to penury," she drew out her purse and produced some coins. "Take these, and tomorrow, when this half-wittedness be past, hire your passage back to me."

"When I have need, I will come to you."

"Do so. Your place is at my hearthstone. Will ye not come now, Amelie?"

"Nay, I cannot!"

"Then, though it stirreth my heart, I must leave ye. To your wagon, Cæsar—Amelie?"

But the old woman had turned away shaking her head.

From a window of the deserted house Amelie watched with shadowed eyes the little caravan move slowly away, watched it debouch from the cart track into the open road, watched until, in the far distance of Charles Town Neck, it vanished into the haze. When she could see it no longer she turned back to

her kitchen, and from some secure hiding place she produced a knife and a little bag that was filled with an impalpable powder. These things she concealed about her person.

As the day waned, she left the house and set out for the streets of the city. Near the waterfront she stopped a passing negro and questioned him. The man stared at her in wonder but answered her to her satisfaction. When she had passed on he stood looking after her. Presently he scratched his head and spat.

"'Fore God, ef de debbil's got any wife, dat's her," he soliloquized.

Following the directions given her, the old woman came, after some walking, to a house on King street. She noted the surroundings minutely, then went into an alley and sat down with her back against a wall. In and out of the house young men, diversely clad in the uniforms of the various regiments of the garrison, came and went. Later, after the darkness had fallen and the street lamps were lighted, she saw Maclae enter.

It was the young Captain's last night in the city. On the turn of the morning tide, the ship Cerberus, now lying in the roads, would make sail and he would be in her cabin. All his difficulties had been resolved, and if any thought of Kate Fowler rose in his mind to tincture his satisfaction with bitterness, his countenance gave no evidence of it. Another ex-

istence had opened before him and all old things had been put away.

In the clubhouse his fellow officers greeted him with acclamation. What a lucky dog he was, they said. As for themselves, there were months more of inaction to be endured in this stale hole of a town. But not every man had a mother, and money, and a wealthy prospective wife waiting for him.

The night was warm and the wind was from the sea. Through the open windows there drifted in the intoxicating perfume of roses and cape jasmine. Wine was opened and the bottle was passed. At one of the windows a dark face appeared—a face with bleared eyes and jowls that hung like dewlaps. No one heeded this observer—perhaps no one noticed her.

"To the King!"

"The wine is with you. Charge your glass and pass the bottle."

She who had disappeared from the window reappeared at the pantry door.

" 'Ere now! 'Ere, I say!" remonstrated the English batsman. "Ye're not wanted 'ere. See?"

Amelia produced a folded paper, waved it toward that door through which the sound of revelry was issuing, and slipped a gold piece into the batsman's hand. "Lady," she muttered brokenly. "Love."

The man looked at the negress. "Well I s'y," he exclaimed in astonishment. But his fist closed over

the coin. "In wi' ye," he conceded, waving her forward. "But ye slipped in mind ye. I ha' no knowledge of ye."

She opened the door and padded into the room, her eyes blinking under the brilliance of the lights.

"Gad!" exclaimed an officer, observing her intrusion. "Am I so soon stewed?"

"What do ye here, woman?" questioned another. "Who sent ye?"

Amelie looked at her questioner and he averted his eyes. "I am not sent—I come," she answered hoarsely.

Maclae had started to his feet, upsetting his chair as he did so. "Amelie!" he gasped in surprise. "The devil take you, old wench—"

She held up the paper. "Message," she explained. "You know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the officers. "She is something overripe, Maclae!"

"You know!" croaked Amelie.

"I know nothing," retorted Maclae irritably, "save that you are damned presumptuous. Hand me the paper."

She approached him with the paper in her left hand—her right was tightly closed. He received the document from her, glanced at it, looked at it again as if puzzled, and bent forward to examine it more closely.

As he did so, she advanced and leaned above him as if she also were looking at the paper, but her body

screened the table in front of him from the observation of the company. Directly before her was his wineglass. Her right hand moved swiftly, hovered over the glass, and opened. A light powder drifted downward, fell into the liquor, and dissolved.

Maclae looked up. "This document is from your master's hand," he said. "It sets you free. What have I to do with that?"

Amelie had already turned and was moving toward the door.

"Here," reiterated Maclae. "Take your damned parchment!" But Amelie had passed outside.

Another shout of laughter greeted Maclae's embarrassment.

"Did she make ye her heir, Maclae?"

"Ye're a devil among the ladies, Maclae!"

"Ye ha' an odd taste in females, Maclae!"

Maclae looked from one to another. "I know not what to make of it," he remarked.

A second burst of laughter followed and was succeeded by a moment of seriousness. "Make nothing of it," advised some one carelessly. "'Tis some poor, daft creature who wandered in."

Maclae shook his head, but he did not explain further.

"A toast!" cried the man at the head of the table. "Here's to Hugh Maclae, a damned good soldier, and damnation to all rebels!"

A dark head, on the outside, rose above the window sill. In company with the others, Maclae

raised his glass high, then lowered and drained it. The head beyond the window withdrew itself abruptly.

The noise went on. More wine was poured and another toast was drunk. The man at the head of the table began a bawdy song. The company pounded its applause. Suddenly the young captain slumped forward and caught at the table for support.

"Some one look out for Maclae!" warned a man sitting opposite.

"What! Drunk already?"

"Nay, he's ill. No drunken man 'd be so pale."

One rose and went to the captain's aid.

"Maclae! I say, Maclae! Help me here, Richardson!" They laid the sufferer on the floor. His eyes were filmed. His limbs twitched.

"Water here!" cried one.

"Bring a pillow," suggested another.

The man who had been supporting Maclae's head stood up abruptly. "Some one fetch a surgeon!" he called out hastily. "I believe the man's dying."

"Nay, he's already dead. He hath no pulse." And a second man dropped the hand which he had been holding.

Amelie sat at the extremity of a deserted wharf. Far out in the harbor, the British fleet lay anchored in a wide semicircle. The tide was at its full, the moonlight tipped the wavelets with silver, and the

reflection of the luminary in the water made a bright, broken path that led outward and ever outward toward the open sea. Presently the tide turned and the ships swung with the ebb.

Then Amelie arose and let herself down into the water. Along the bright path made by the moon she began to swim steadily and strongly. On she went, and on. Suddenly she stopped—she raised her hands high—she disappeared. The wavelets were tipped with silver and the tide flowed outward toward the open sea.